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New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Address by Mr. Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic of Albania

The President: The Assembly will first hear an address by the President of the Republic of Albania.

Mr. Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic of Albania, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic of Albania, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Meidani (*spoke in French*): This year's session of the General Assembly is marked by profound sadness over the innocent victims of the macabre acts perpetrated by terrorists two months ago here in the United States of America, and now also by the events of this morning. On behalf of the Government and the people of Albania, I would like to express our utter indignation and our strongest and categorical condemnation of those acts, which were aimed not at a single country but, rather, were a serious attack on the values of democracy, freedom and world civilization. At the same time, I would like to convey our deepest sympathy to the American people and to all the families that lost loved ones in those tragic events.

International terrorism is today becoming one of the greatest challenges for the world in which we live. It is essential that the international community tackle this phenomenon with the greatest seriousness, for it is replete with catastrophic consequences in many areas.

Albania considers the military actions of the anti-terrorism coalition led by the United States and Great Britain against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Al Qaeda terrorist group, under the leadership of bin Laden, to be just and in full conformity with Chapter VII of the Charter and Security Council resolutions. Taking that into account, and as a country that defends the values of liberty and democracy, Albania expressed its determination to be part of that coalition from the outset.

The international action that has just begun against terrorism should not be seen as a clash between civilizations. On the contrary, we Albanians see it as a struggle between good and evil and as a confrontation in which the values of humanism and peace are set against obscurantism and the negation of values. The only way to win this war is for all of our countries to unite their forces to create a common front, to take increasingly Draconian preventive measures at the national level, and to deploy ways and means for cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral levels to block any individual terrorist or terrorist group that threatens international peace and security. For its part, with the mechanisms at its disposal, the United Nations could and should do more to coordinate those efforts.

Albania welcomes the measures taken by the United Nations to respond to acts of terrorism. We strongly support Security Council resolution 1373

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(2001) and call on all Member States to fulfil their obligations under the resolution. We also support the current efforts aimed at completing the United Nations legal framework for coordination and for the international community's efforts to combat terrorism. For its part, Albania is already a party to eight major international conventions on the struggle against terrorism. We shall soon adhere to six more conventions.

The new Albanian Government's four-year programme has set very clear objectives to definitively take the country out of its long transition stage and place it on the path towards stable economic development, the consolidation of its democratic institutions and legal framework, and integration into the European family. Thanks to sustained efforts, Albania has already established an encouraging climate for individual Albanian entrepreneurship as well as for foreign investment.

Moreover, Albanian institutions will keep the struggle against terrorism, organized crime, illegal trafficking and corruption at the centre of their activities. The responsible commitment of the country's leaders to an uncompromising struggle against those phenomena, as well as their cooperation with other countries in the region and beyond, has in most cases kept in check the activities of criminal elements who seek to exploit Albania as a transit country for various types of illegal trafficking.

Ms. Dlamini Zuma (South Africa), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Albania believes that a mosaic of fledging democracies is already taking shape in the Balkans, albeit with difficulties. Believing that domestic political and economic stability are intrinsically linked to regional stability, Albania has committed itself to applying a regional policy of good-neighbourliness towards all Balkan countries, and has already given concrete proof of that desire. One clear sign of that policy was the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Belgrade Government at the beginning of the year. That was a logical follow-up to the democratic developments begun in the Republic of Serbia that led to results that were eagerly awaited by the whole of the international community, namely, the fall of the Milosević regime and his dispatch to the Tribunal at The Hague. The same fate should also befall the other criminals who carried out the policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing he planned.

On behalf of peace and stability in the region, as well as on behalf of good-neighbourliness, Albania has adopted a realistic attitude, even with regard to the most recent crisis in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The position we adopted was very much appreciated by the international community.

The Albanian Government welcomed the Ochrid framework Agreement between the Macedonian authorities and the Albanian political forces, and we hope that it will soon be implemented in a comprehensive manner, as this would contribute to peace and stability in Macedonia and in the region. We also warmly welcome the indispensable role of, and the efforts made by, international mediators, which led to the signing of the Agreement, as well as the commitment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to ensure its implementation on the ground.

The Albanian State has good relations of cooperation with Kosovo, and we greatly appreciate the positive developments that have taken place there. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, and Mr. Haekkerup personally, have taken a number of very important steps in order to finalize the legal framework for Kosovo and to organize the general elections, which will be held on 17 November.

The elections will represent an important chapter in the history of Kosovo and of the region, because this will be the first time in their history that the people of Kosovo will be electing, in a free and democratic manner, democratic Government bodies that will take charge of the future of Kosovo. We would like to express our sincere hope that the Serb minority and the other minorities living in Kosovo will participate in these elections, because we consider them to be an integral part of Kosovar society.

Although I do not wish to speak at great length about the many problems that are facing Kosovo, I would simply like to appeal to the international community to actively seek a solution to the issue of divided Mitrovica. Practices aimed at averting inter-ethnic conflict in Kosovo such as compromises in the area of territorial compensation based on the concept of parcelling out its territory, and the establishment of parallel institutions, are harmful and should be

deplored. They will not benefit Kosovo. They will simply give rise to a fresh surge of the inter-ethnic hatred that was fuelled by Milosevic. The international community and the active political forces in Kosovo must make every effort to build a new and open society that respects ethnic, religious and cultural diversity.

Albania has established good relations of cooperation with the countries in the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally. It has endeavoured to play its part in contributing to peace and stability in the Balkans, including through the framework of the Southeast Europe Cooperation Process, whose chairmanship Albania currently holds. In the framework of this initiative, Albania will play an even more active role in coordinating the efforts of member States with a view to strengthening multilateral cooperation in all areas, in order to overcome the crises and problems of the region.

The Albanian Government will continue with this commitment over the next four years. It will work also within the framework of other regional initiatives, where one of our important commitments is to implement joint infrastructure projects in the framework of the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe.

Like the other countries of the region, Albania has embraced with enthusiasm the process of integration into Euro-Atlantic bodies, as its strategic objective and principal priority is to become a member of the European Union.

The Albanian Government welcomed the decision taken last June by the Göteborg Summit to begin in the near future the process of negotiations for the signing of a stabilization and association agreement. The Albanian Government hopes that these negotiations will be concluded as soon as possible and that the agreement will be signed within the next year. We are aware that this will require coordination and cooperation at all Government levels in order for us to be able to meet the political, economic, social and other standards emanating from this process.

We are convinced that integration has to start at home and that we will have to do more to achieve the results required by the European Union in all areas, particularly when it comes to progress in effecting reform, and especially in terms of consolidating our legal system, harmonizing our legislation with the existing body of community agreements, and the carrying out of effective macro- and micro-economic policies.

Joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is one of Albania's strategic objectives. Thanks to its close relationship with the Euro-Atlantic Alliance in the last few years, it is one of the nine countries that the Alliance has designated as being potential candidates for NATO membership.

Today humanity is facing both new and old threats. Conflicts between States; inter-ethnic conflicts; terrorism and organized crime; widespread poverty and the wide gap that exists between the poor and the rich countries, including the digital divide; natural disasters and the drying up of energy resources; diseases such as AIDS and other epidemic illnesses, and those spread by bioterrorism, have long been the subject of study in the international community. Current developments throughout the world have shown, now more than ever, the vital importance and the crucial role of the United Nations in achieving peace and security and in fostering development throughout the world.

The Millennium Summit showed yet again that it is essential for each State Member of our Organization to maintain an ongoing commitment to contribute to resolving regional and international conflicts and tensions and to address such challenges as globalization, poverty, HIV/AIDS, drugs, and the achievement of sustainable development.

But beyond these challenges, the United Nations is facing a multitude of problems related to its reform. It must manage its resources even better so that they can be used as much as possible for peacekeeping and for development projects in all of the poor countries, the countries in transition and the developing countries. The United Nations should also become as representative a body as possible.

Finally, the United Nations must devise and implement wholeheartedly mechanisms that are not bureaucratic or complex but streamlined and effective, in order to ensure that its activities become more concrete and bear more fruit and that its voice carries the highest authority throughout the world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Albania for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Rexhep Meidani, President of the Republic of Albania, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The Acting President: I call on Her Excellency Mrs. Maria E. Levens, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Suriname.

Mrs. Levens (Suriname): My delegation cannot find the words to convey its sadness about the plane crash that occurred in a residential area in New York this morning. At moments like these, silence speaks for itself. The Government and the people of Suriname offer their heartfelt condolences to the families of all the victims. We pray that our love and friendship may bring comfort and peace to all who have been affected by this tragedy and by the horrific attacks on 11 September.

During the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, the need for dialogue is proving to be essential throughout world. In Suriname, we have always tried to apply the concept of dialogue.

Suriname is a small country with a multi-ethnic population. Our ancestors came to Suriname generations ago from West Africa, China, India, Indonesia, Europe and the Middle East. We have been fortunate that, owing to mutual respect and understanding, in Suriname these groups have lived together and are living together peacefully. More than ever, we realize that this harmony should be treasured and nurtured, since we can no longer take peace and harmony for granted.

Our Government plays a very important role in this peaceful coexistence, because we have strongly promoted and actively worked for mutual respect and consensus. We believe that for people to be actively involved in the development of the country, they must be able to see themselves represented in national and local government. We strongly promote such consensus democracy in Suriname, for this power-sharing arrangement has stimulated all ethnic groups to be tolerant and respectful of each other's political ideologies, cultures and religions. Our Government and our people firmly uphold the principle of freedom of religion, as well as of tolerance and respect for each other's forms of cultural expression.

In the same vein, the indigenous people of Suriname live in the interior with their own cultural and religious beliefs. The needs and rights of indigenous people are dealt with at the highest level in our Government. Their views and concerns are shared with the central Government through continuous dialogue. My Government therefore looks forward to the first conference of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, scheduled to take place in May 2002.

We know, and have experience of the fact, that people's primordial attachments become stronger at times of need and despair. The grief of families from the United States of America and other parts of the world has been deeply felt, and all over the globe many families and groups have turned to each other for comfort. Our hearts go out to all of the victims of the 11 September attacks and their families.

We cannot yet assess all the social and economic effects of those attacks. However, we have already seen the devastating effects on the Caribbean in terms of loss of income in, for example, tourism and trade. Natural disasters have also affected our area, and my delegation sympathizes with the people of the Caribbean, especially those of Belize and Cuba, whose countries were recently struck by hurricanes Iris and Michelle.

As a member of the Caribbean Community, we know that we have grave problems in the region. Limited access to global markets because of stringent trade rules and World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations have resulted in increased poverty in our region. Suriname pleads for an institutional arrangement between the United Nations and the WTO so as to allow developing countries easier access to that body.

We have further expanded and deepened our regional ties. In this respect, we would like to express our gratitude to the countries of the western hemisphere which have offered us assistance and shown their support for including us in the various integration movements.

We in the Caribbean enjoy a high level of democracy and are guided by the rule of law. Our Governments have been actively involved in creating

an environment to attract foreign investors and to increase the production of goods and services. We still need assistance. The promises made by the developed countries in the Millennium Declaration of 2000 have not yielded an increase in official development assistance. We, the countries in development, need equal opportunities.

If we, as the international community, agree that human-centred development is at the top of our agenda, we need to understand that we have to achieve it together. If our goal is to eradicate abject poverty, we must make an effort to achieve that goal. Cutting in half by 2015 the number of people living on less than $1 a day is one of the main goals we want to achieve for the benefit of the truly disadvantaged.

The International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in March 2002 in Mexico, will give both developed and developing countries an opportunity to reach concrete agreements and make arrangements for resources for development. If we do not take the opportunity offered by that Conference to work towards sustainable development for all people in the world, we will miss a great chance to achieve a more equitable distribution of global wealth.

If we do not take that opportunity, we will also miss the chance to intensify our struggle to combat deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, which affect millions in the world. We in the Caribbean have committed ourselves to continue the struggle against HIV/AIDS in our region. We must not lose sight of the fact that people are still dying every day of this disease. It is up to us, the international community, to find solutions and improve the lives of those billions of people who are faced with global problems such as extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and illiteracy, as well as problems resulting from the debt burden, the refugee issue, environmental degradation and the widening gap between rich and poor.

Suriname has made great efforts in gender equality, and, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, we have begun training programmes in gender sensitivity. We have women in high-level positions, and it gives me great pleasure to tell the Assembly that our current delegation consists mainly of women. We are pleased with this development in my country, but we still have a long way to go.

Our commitment to the role of women has prompted my country to work on a draft resolution in the Third Committee of the General Assembly on mainstreaming the situation of older women into society, to ensure that that part of the population will not be marginalized further in our societies.

Ageing has become a subject of increasing concern to the international community, for it raises significant social and cultural questions, as well as questions of economic stability. My Government will join the international community and the United Nations to address and support the United Nations initiative to achieve a society for all ages. We should come up with appropriate strategies to collectively deal with these issues during the Second World Assembly on Ageing.

Human development constitutes one of the key pillars of the development policy of my Government. People, especially our children, are our country's greatest treasure. This is why looking after their well-being is placed high on our national agenda. Suriname is looking forward to the Special Session on Children that has been postponed to 2002.

Suriname hopes that the World Summit on Sustainable Development of 2002, in Johannesburg, and the assessment of the Earth Summit of June 1992, will lead to recommendations and commitments for the implementation of real sustainable human development in a globally sustainable environment. Protecting the environment is the responsibility of all countries. Suriname took a first step in conserving biodiversity for contemporary and future generations by establishing the largest protected nature reserve in South America three years ago. With this first step, we hope to encourage other countries in the world to protect the environment, and to work together on the many emerging global environmental threats.

Suriname is extremely concerned about the trans-shipment of nuclear waste through the Caribbean Sea, but we are pleased to see that so many countries have ratified the Kyoto Protocol.

The ever-widening global digital divide that prevents developing countries from benefiting fully from the advancements in information technology is a concern that we have discussed in various international forums, but it still needs much more of our attention.

The effects of globalization have not been favourable to most developing countries. However, we have come to understand and experience that our world is an interdependent one, and we cannot turn back this clock. The attacks of the 11 September have shown us how interdependent we are. The loss of lives was directly felt in the United States and in more than 80 countries in the rest of the world. The economic effects are also being felt in all parts of the world.

In conclusion, the Secretary-General and the United Nations received the Nobel Peace Prize this year at a time when the world was still trying to comprehend the horrific attacks of 11 September on the United States. Suriname hopes that this distinguished award will encourage the United Nations to continue its important work for human rights, peace, social justice, human development, human-rights education and economic prosperity for all the peoples of the world. We congratulate the Secretary-General on this prestigious award and his re-election. And we congratulate Mr. Han on his election as President and look forward to his guidance and leadership during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

As members of the United Nations family, we are called upon to practice tolerance and to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours. Because of the devastating consequences of 11 September, we have the obligation to look closely at the root causes of terrorism. The causes of terrorism have to be discussed and dealt with to protect all our peoples and interests. For the world is our home, and we are the people who live in it.

Mr. Cimoszewicz (Poland): We have just learned of the crash of an American Airlines plane in New York. We the Polish delegation, offer our heartfelt condolences, and express our sympathy to the Government of the United States and the Dominican Republic and to the families of the victims of this tragedy.

At the outset, let me offer Mr. Han my sincere congratulations on his election to the prestigious office of the President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. The delegation of the Republic of Poland extends to him its firm support in his demanding mandate.

Let me likewise express to the former President, Mr. Harri Holkeri, of Finland, our appreciation for his remarkable leadership, which he brought to the fifty-fifth session of the Assembly.

I should also like to convey to Mr. Kofi Annan, the distinguished Secretary-General, my sincere greetings, and to say how pleased Poland is at his second term in that high post. May I also take this opportunity to renew to him, and indeed to this Organization as a whole, my Government's congratulations on the recent Nobel Peace Prize. The award comes as a timely token of appreciation of the way the United Nations and the Secretary-General have been meeting their formidable challenge.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The appalling tragedy of 11 September calls for resolute reaction of the entire international community, for active solidarity with the United States and for effective counter-measures against those who sow death, hatred and terror.

The terrorist attack of 11 September, the way it came about and the circumstances by which it was conditioned should be seized by the international community as an occasion for an in-depth reassessment of the very foundations of the international order. Preoccupied as we are with ever-new developments each day, we tend to be mentally incapable of following signals that predict new trends in international relations. We have hardly been able to afford the time for searching reflection on, and adjustment to, negative phenomena that, if ignored, can, in time, become the breeding ground for upheavals and conflicts. In this era of enormous new challenges, it is time for creative thinking, vision and intellectual courage.

The essence of security has changed dramatically. In Poland's view, all aspects of security need urgent, thorough and imaginative reassessment. In this context particularly searching reflection must be focused on the role of the State — an entity that operates in entirely new circumstances in an era of dramatically increasing integration, globalization and fragmentation. This is a time of interdependence and multiculturalism, in which openness, close international cooperation and interaction should be seen as countermeasures against diverse processes of fragmentation and disintegration, which can lead us even further towards the nationalism, separatism, closure and isolation that loom all around. Fragmentation is creating instability and conflicts. And

the most dangerous fragmentation process of the current era is being generated by the widening development gap between regions and States, which has been so well attested and documented by many United Nations publications. In this, the role of the United Nations is particularly fundamental and crucial. There is no better-equipped and more universal forum to deal with those issues.

At the Headquarters of an Organization which the peoples of the United Nations established 56 years ago in order to maintain international peace and security, that axiom should be self-evident. The whole world is trying to respond to the challenges of globalization, the new scientific revolution, and — quite recently — the destabilizing forces of terror. The United Nations should find adequate answers to those challenges. This is a time for collective and resolute action.

Perhaps as ominous as terrorism itself is the fact that in some countries, the monstrous acts of violence that have taken place have been met with some sympathy on the part of those who are destitute, deprived of any hope, and who, driven to the margins of social life, have become frustrated and desperate.

Terrorists must never be exculpated or their actions justified. We need to do away with the reasons why many perceive terrorists as "present-day Robin Hoods". Though such a perception can be described as groundless, this does not release us from our responsibility to take a careful and courageous look at the phenomena that are emerging in the present international order, which tend to consolidate inequalities and lead to various social calamities.

From the very beginning, Poland has proclaimed itself entirely on the side of the international anti-terrorist coalition. We are working seriously and diligently on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001).

Regional undertakings can make a significant contribution to drafting a global strategy for the struggle against terrorism. With that in mind, last week in Warsaw we organized a very successful international Conference on Combating Terrorism. The Conference was attended by representatives of 17 Central European, Baltic and Balkan States, including 13 Presidents. The Conference also provided a direct connection with the White House and President Bush, who had the opportunity to talk directly with the Conference's participants. The declaration adopted by the Conference indicates a strong political commitment to fight against that plague at the dawn of the twenty-first century, in close collaboration with the United States and the entire international community.

The plan of action adopted at that Conference spells out concrete measures. It is significant that the leaders of that region of Europe gave unanimous backing to the relevant actions of the United Nations, the European Union and other organizations.

In the course of Poland's very complicated history, my nation has on several occasions been betrayed by disloyal neighbours and allies and has paid the highest price for this. Therefore we understand better than anyone how priceless and crucial true loyalty and alliances are. Thus we will continue to support our friends and allies by all available means. Our principal goal at present is to ease peoples' fears - fears that have been imposed on them by the enemies of mankind.

The horrible scenario in which public order and the safety of peoples is threatened, passenger planes hijacked and destroyed, deadly viruses spread and water poisoned must not be repeated. We must defeat those who participate in, or contribute to creating, such a threat. Our approach must be a comprehensive one. Let me make it clear: there is no room for any selectivity, flexibility or relativism when the most fundamental values of humankind are openly and furiously attacked.

However, we need to reconsider our position on how to respond to the needs of those millions who every day suffer from hunger, disease and a lack of clean water. For them, the same question arises every morning — a question that sounds like the classical phrase "to be or not to be". That question is how to survive. Extreme poverty deprives people of their inherent dignity and human rights and of their chance for a better tomorrow, thus pushing them to take desperate steps.

Let the tragedy of 11 September teach all of us to collectively combat evil. Let us do everything to ensure that the forces of darkness never prevail.

In the course of the last few years it has been eloquently argued, from this very rostrum, that globalization is a very positive force which will ultimately usher in an era of prosperity and stability and a global society. Alas, this has not happened.

This calls for a new approach to international cooperation, for a new role on the part of multilateral institutions, and for the restoration of the primacy of courageous political decisions and intergovernmental accords. This also calls, on the one hand, for greater moderation on the part of the strong and the rich, and, on the other, for more determined endeavours on the part of the weak and the poor, who must be convinced that their consistent aspirations to improve their own lot will ultimately pay off. In my opinion, the promotion of democracy and good governance offers one of the most important paths towards such a goal. Poland's own experience in the past 12 years, since the historic transformations of 1989, testifies to the merits of that path.

It is my Government's firm view that, in the face of the threats which will forever be symbolized by the atrocities of 11 September, the interests of international security would be well served by the earliest possible signature and ratification of, or adherence to, the multilateral conventions against terrorism which have been elaborated under the auspices of the United Nations. In particular, the spreading anthrax scare, which represents but the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the potential danger of bioterrorism, and the spreading of fissile materials and chemical weapons are a powerful argument for the urgent need to strengthen and strictly enforce the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972 and other legal instruments in this field.

We should immediately move — to quote the Secretary-General — from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention.

While imperative, the struggle against terrorism must not obscure the necessity for the United Nations to effectively discharge the mandate entrusted to it by the international community — a mandate whose scope is expanding over the years. This is not only true with respect to the international security problems which I have just referred to, but also concerns problems related to socio-economic cooperation, the protection of human rights and humanitarian issues, particularly those concerning refugees and the protection of the environment.

Also of major importance, in our view, is the elaboration and adoption of a package of regulations and commitments in respect of development aid, indebtedness and trade. Thus I wish to emphasize the importance of the full implementation of the set of principles and practical measures embodied in the Millennium Declaration. We are mindful, of course, that the translation of that programme into practical steps cannot be the responsibility of the United Nations alone. It is essential for other institutions and organizations, including financial, trade and regional ones, to help in that effort. Above all, individual States must become directly involved, otherwise the smooth and timely implementation of the Millennium Declaration could be seriously jeopardized.

The United Nations is now facing enormous and unprecedented challenges. These challenges – arising as they do at the dawn of the new millennium - mean growing divisions and, indeed, pose a risk of fragmentation of the international community.

My country, Poland, is ready to be an active participant in the process of searching for a new role for the United Nations. We have been active throughout the entire history of the United Nations, and we want to be active in the immediate future as well.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalghem, Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Mr. Shalghem (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the President on his unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. His choice to assume this high post is a reflection of Member States' appreciation of him personally and their confidence in his ability to conduct the deliberations of this session in a manner that would enable it to reach conclusions that would contribute to the strengthening of stability and the promotion of development all over the world.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to express our gratitude and appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Harri Holkeri, President of the previous session of the Assembly, which witnessed many activities that have gone a long way towards responding to the common concerns of the international community.

Our great appreciation also goes to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, who continues to perform his duties with dedication and renewed vigour, even under very difficult

circumstances. His re-election to a second term at the helm of the Organization and the fact that he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, together with the United Nations, this year is testimony to the appreciation of his work and the confidence in his ability to further enhance the role of the United Nations and to make it more effective in facing the challenges of the new millennium.

On 11 September, several American cities, including the City of New York, which hosts our Organization, were subjected to terrorist attacks to which thousands of innocent people fell victim. Once again I express to the people of the United States and the families of the victims, who lost their loved ones, my deepest sympathies. We in Libya, having been subjected to various forms of terrorism, including State terrorism, realize better than others the cruelty and the depth of feelings that the American people suffered and the psychological impact, particularly on the families of the victims. My country has therefore condemned those painful events, emphasizing our firm position, which denounces terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and calls for the eradication of this phenomenon, which endangers the independence of States and the lives of peoples.

We, in Libya appreciate the measures taken by the international community to uproot terrorism, including the number of agreements made — the most important of which we are already party to, and the rest of which we are in the process of acceding to. Nevertheless, it is very evident that there is an urgent need to take other measures to confront the challenges posed by this phenomenon. This will necessitate seeking and eradicating the roots of terrorism. It is also imperative to take effective action to put an end to terrorist practices and to eliminate all the reasons and motives that stand behind terrorism.

Before achieving this, we must agree on a uniform definition of terrorism to determine ways of combating it. We cannot condemn terrorism and fight it when it hits one country and turn a blind eye when it hits other countries and peoples. It is also very dangerous to link terrorism to a certain religion or nationality, as terrorism has no nationality and no religion. Further, it is unacceptable to label as terrorism the struggle of peoples to protect themselves or to attain independence while ignoring real terrorism, which has several faces and is practised in different ways.

Occupation, provocation and aggression against peoples, like that against Libya in 1986, is all terrorism. The establishment of military bases on the territories of others is terrorism. Fleets that roam the seas are stationed off the coasts of other States and violate their territorial waters are forms of terrorism. The downing of civilian aircraft, like the Libyan aircraft that was hijacked and destroyed over Sinai in 1973, is terrorism. Mass massacres are terrorism. The training of extreme elements in certain countries and facilitating their arrival in other countries to carry out criminal acts, including assassinations, as happened in my country in 1984 and 1993, is terrorism. The acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of their use is terrorism. The imposition by one State of unilateral, coercive measures against other countries and the enactment by the same State of laws to punish others who maintain relations with these countries is also terrorism. Exploiting the Security Council to impose sanctions against peoples without any justification or evidence is terrorism. Preventing the Council from adopting measures to protect those who are subjected to killing and displacement constitutes support for and encouragement of terrorism.

Due to these considerations, we believe it has become important and necessary to take international action to combat terrorism at all levels. We think that such action could be effective if undertaken under the umbrella of the United Nations, in accordance with the purposes and principles of its Charter. My country was among the first to act in this context when, in 1992, we called on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to request the convening of a special session of the General Assembly devoted to the consideration of the means of combating terrorism.

Today, we renew this call out of a conviction that this is the best way to study the question of terrorism with a view to arriving at an accurate definition of terrorism far removed from selfish and subjective classifications. We are also convinced that this is the best way to deal with this phenomenon in all its political, economic and social aspects and, consequently, to take the necessary measures to fully uproot it.

Every year, we gather here to review and assess our achievements. Despite the tragic events of 11 September, we notice that the previous year witnessed a number of important developments. The General Assembly held more than one special session. Two

high-level conferences were held within the framework of the United Nations, one of which was devoted to the situation of the least developed countries and the other, to our common struggle against racism and xenophobia. In the declarations and programmes of action resulting from these conferences, there was a rededication and commitment to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, aimed at maintaining international peace and security and developing friendly relations among States. It was also affirmed that more efforts would be made to implement priorities such as the promotion of development, the provision of shelter for all, the eradication of want and diseases, the ending of injustice and unfairness and the uprooting of discrimination in all its forms.

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya participated in all these forums, and we are happy to have contributed to their successful results. Like other Members of this Organization, we have an interest in the establishment of peace, the realization of justice and the support of sustainable development. Notwithstanding all these achievements, it is abundantly clear that there is a need for further efforts so that we may be able to address the additional challenges facing all Members of the United Nations.

One such challenge is the environmental degradation that threatens life on Earth, our common home. Violence and armed conflicts also rage in several regions. Millions suffer from abject poverty in many places in developing countries. Diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, threaten the lives of entire communities.

There are still those who challenge the collective will and cling to unilaterally enacted laws, applying them to all. Old ideological barriers have been replaced with new barriers, including impeding access of many developing countries to the technology necessary for their development and advancement. Moreover, our world is still not free of criminal activity, including the illicit trade in small weapons and narcotics and transnational organized crime.

The United Nations is the tool of our common work in our efforts to face these challenges. Undoubtedly it has made many efforts, but it could certainly be more effective in carrying out its duties if drastic structural reforms were made to its organs and if new working methods were developed for its various mechanisms. Many proposals have been submitted over the past few years in this regard, but, unfortunately, they did not resonate with certain Powers that care only for their narrow selfish interests. This makes it incumbent upon the other Members of this Organization that have a real stake in reform to unify their efforts and capacities to effect inevitable change, if we want our Organization to succeed, consistent with the spirit of the times, and to meet the needs of the people.

For our part, we wish once again to reaffirm that such change should be aimed at achieving the following.

First, it must enhance and develop cooperation among the principal organs of the United Nations, and between these organs and other bodies and agencies of the United Nations system, with a view to resolving international problems in all their aspects.

Secondly, it must enhance the role of the General Assembly, making it more effective, so that it can carry out the functions entrusted to it by the Charter, including contributing to the adoption of measures to maintain international peace and security. The Assembly should have the authority to control and to hold accountable other United Nations organs, including the Security Council, which should be accountable to the Assembly.

Thirdly, it must establish a mechanism affiliated with the General Assembly to follow up the implementation of Assembly resolutions. We cannot wait indefinitely for the implementation of resolutions, most of which were adopted more than 50 years ago.

Fourthly, it must accelerate the introduction of radical reform to the Security Council membership in order to apply the principle of equitable geographic distribution and thus do justice to the disadvantaged regions in Africa, Asia and Latin America that are under-represented in the Council. Reform should also apply to improving the Council's working methods to ensure transparency in its work and democracy in its decision-making.

Fifthly, the privileges emanating from victories of the Second World War must be withdrawn, the most important being the right of veto, which has become obsolete. Therefore, there is no longer any justification for maintaining it, not only because it contravenes the principle of the sovereign equality of States, but also because it has been used to protect aggressors from

condemnation. It is also being used to prevent the adoption of measures to protect those subjected to aggression, killing, displacement and other acts of genocide.

Seeking to establish peace and enhance stability is among the major purposes of the United Nations. This Organization certainly cannot perform all these functions alone. Member States can establish effective mechanisms to resolve the most intractable problems. In this context, we in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya have made consistent efforts to assist countries suffering from conflicts and disputes. Talks held last June, under the auspices of the Qadhafi Charitable Organization, between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Front, led to the signature of the Tripoli Peace Agreement, ending a bitter conflict and meeting the aspirations of both parties for the restoration of security and stability in southern Philippines.

We have participated effectively in various negotiations that have resulted in the settlement of the Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute and the conclusion of the Arusha Agreement, ending the conflict in Burundi. Together with other African countries, we are intensifying our efforts to support reconciliation in Somalia and the restoration of peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the basis of the Lusaka Agreement, emanating from the agreement signed in the city of Sirte in September 1999.

Currently, intensive efforts are being made to implement the Libyan-Egyptian initiative, in coordination with the initiative of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, to achieve broad-based national reconciliation in the Sudan so that its people can live in harmony and stability, based on the unity and territorial integrity of that sisterly country and equality among its people.

We take great pride in our contributions and achievements. But above all, Libyans from all walks of life — men and women — greatly cherish the historic event that took place in March of this year, when African leaders announced the establishment of the African Union at the second Sirte summit. This was followed by the thirty-seventh summit of the Organization of African Unity, held last July, which took progressive practical measures to strengthen the fundamentals of this Union, which is an important transformation in the history of Africa, realizing as it did, the dream of the forefathers of a unified Africa. It was the culmination of the efforts of the great African leaders whose objective has always been the unity of the continent so that it could enhance its security and progress and build its future. It is a new phase in an African renaissance that will eliminate rifts that divide the continent and will establish one bloc for all Africans, capable of confronting various challenges in a world of large groupings.

The fact that Africa has taken all these initiatives and steps sends a clear message to other countries of the world that Africa fully realizes that resolving its problems and developing its abilities is primarily the responsibility of the Africans. Yet we must emphasize that there will be no peace, security or stability in the world as long as Africa suffers from problems and disturbances. For that, the United Nations and all countries must assist in the efforts of African countries to establish peace throughout the continent and to enhance security in all its corners. This requires primarily support for Africa's dispute-settlement mechanisms, assistance in eradicating the poverty of millions of its people and the elimination of diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, which threatens the lives of more than 30 million Africans.

Moreover, a solution must be found to the problem of external debt, which devours most of Africa's earnings. Moreover, an end must be put to consequences of colonialism, the cause of Africa's underdevelopment and the obstacle to its progress. The only way to do justice to the peoples of Africa is for those States that conquered their land, looted the continent's resources and built their progress at its expense to apologize to the peoples of Africa for these practices and to pay them full compensation for the losses and damages caused by colonialism.

The international community has thus far failed to resolve the Palestinian problem, which is almost as old as the United Nations itself. This is essentially due to disregard of the core of the problem, which is that a land was usurped and its people were expelled from their homeland. Thus, Palestine remained occupied. Most of its people became refugees in various parts of the world, and those who stayed were made into prisoners in their own homes, deprived of the most basic human rights. The Palestinian people are being subjected to the most heinous crimes committed against any people in contemporary history. Palestinian children and young and elderly people are assassinated, their land is confiscated, their farms are burnt and their

houses are demolished to be replaced by houses of settlers who came from various parts of the world in pursuit of unbelievable and illogical myths.

Old and new developments of the Palestinian question are sufficient proof that ending the suffering of the Palestinians under occupation cannot be achieved through plans that are never implemented. It has also been cogently proven that the problem will not be resolved by the resolutions that the United Nations has been reiterating for more than five decades.

In the light of those irrefutable facts, the solution that should be sought, and on which all efforts must focus, lies in what my country has said before and reaffirms now: the Palestinian people must return to their homeland, from which they were expelled, and a democratic, non-racist State must be established in which all citizens are equal irrespective of religion or ethnicity, a State similar to the one that has been established in the Republic of South Africa. Any other solution would be a fantasy that would serve only to perpetuate the Palestinian tragedy.

Speaking of the situation in the eastern Arab region, my country reaffirms its unlimited support for sisterly Syria and Lebanon in their steadfastness in the face of Israeli aggression. We condemn all attempts to provoke those countries, and we uphold their right to recover all their territories under occupation.

Turning to the current situation in Iraq, we condemn the daily violations of Iraqi sovereignty and the continuous aggression to which Iraq is subjected. We call on all peace-loving countries to work towards the lifting of the sanctions imposed on the Iraqi people and towards putting an end to all schemes aimed at destroying their capacities and at dividing their land.

Tireless efforts have been made in the field of disarmament. My country is a party to most international disarmament agreements and is in the process of acceding to the remaining ones, including the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. But we firmly believe that general and complete disarmament cannot come about without a change in current norms and in the approach to disarmament issues. What we see today is a growing trend towards the control of small arms and light weapons rather than of the weapons of mass destruction that pose a greater threat to international peace and security and to human life.

That is why we wonder about the sharp focus on the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, even though it addresses only simple, limited weapons that small and weak countries need to defend their borders against powerful countries that possess aircraft carriers and aeroplanes that can be refueled in the air. Why should we not focus our efforts on the destruction of chemical and biological weapons and of ballistic missiles? Why are nuclear-weapon States not serious about practical measures to destroy their nuclear stockpiles? Why are certain countries falsely accused of acquiring weapons of mass destruction while there is silence about the Israelis, who, as everybody knows, possess hundreds of nuclear warheads and other weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons? Moreover, Israel continues to defy the will of the international community, which has called on it to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency in order to help ensure that the region is free of nuclear weapons.

We want the important question of disarmament to be dealt with in a comprehensive and non-selective manner. Efforts should be concentrated first and foremost on the adoption of practical measures to destroy nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. That should apply to all those that possess such weapons without exception; they should cease insisting on the development of new defensive systems that could threaten the world's strategic stability and trigger a new arms race. Unless the matter is addressed in that way, disarmament efforts will be meaningless; they will remain a great fraud perpetrated on all the peoples of the world.

During the past nine sessions of the General Assembly, we have reviewed developments in the dispute between my country and a number of Western countries over the United States aeroplane that crashed over Lockerbie. During the past two sessions, we have focused on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya's cooperation with the Scottish court that has been meeting in the Netherlands since the two Libyan suspects decided voluntarily to appear before it. On each occasion, we have reiterated our request that the Security Council lift the sanctions it imposed on the Libyan people,

because Libya has fully responded to the requirements of Council resolutions 731 (1992), 748 (1992) and 1192 (1998). That was confirmed by the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council, submitted in conformity with paragraph 16 of Security Council resolution 883 (1993).

We are obliged once again to broach this question, and for a valid reason: the developments of earlier this year. As members know, on 3 May 2000 the Scottish court began its trial of the two Libyans suspected of being linked to the Pan Am aircraft incident. During the trial it became very clear that the judges were not convinced of the truth of testimony from the three witnesses offered by the other party as witnesses for the prosecution. The court concluded that the principal witness in the case, Mr. Abdul Majid Giaka, was lying, as were Tony Gauci and Edwin Bollier. In paragraph 45 of its opinion, the court stated:

> "We have assessed carefully the evidence of these three witnesses ... relating to the MST-13 timers .... All three, and notably Mr. Bollier, were shown to be unreliable witnesses. [Their various statements were] at times in conflict with each other ... On some occasions, particularly in the case of Mr. Bollier, their evidence was self-contradictory."

It was thus fully expected that the Scottish court would acquit both suspects for lack of evidence. But the decision of 31 January 2001 ran counter to those expectations. The court convicted one of the suspects, Mr. Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed Al Megrahi, and acquitted the second, Mr. Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah. That judgement came as a surprise to all political analysts and jurists, for whom it raised many questions, including why one of the suspects was convicted when the two principal prosecution witnesses were proven to have lied and when the court found the third unreliable. How could the court's decision to convict one man and acquit the other be explained, since they were both suspected on the basis of the same assumptions?

The only answer to those questions is that, at the last moment, the court departed from applying the law and instead took a political decision. The first to indicate this was Robert Black, an architect of the Lockerbie court, who said that the elements of the case against Al Megrahi were very weak. And Hans Köchler, a university professor appointed by the Secretary-General as an international observer of the trial, issued a report dated 3 February 2001, which included many comments, including the following:

> "[The Opinion] is totally incomprehensible for any rational observer when one considers that the indictment in its very essence was based on the joint action of the two accused in Malta.
>
> "The Opinion of the Court is exclusively based on circumstantial evidence and on a series of highly problematic inferences. As to the undersigned's knowledge, there is not one single piece of material evidence linking the two accused to the crime. In such a context, the guilty verdict in regard to the first accused appears to be arbitrary, even irrational.
>
> "...
>
> "This leads ... to the suspicion that political considerations may have been overriding a strictly judicial evaluation of the case."

In placing these facts before the United Nations membership, we want to stress that the conviction handed down by the court on 31 January 2001 was a political decision that had nothing to do with the law. The Libyan citizen Mr. Al Megrahi was kidnapped for political reasons, as confirmed in resolutions and statements adopted by a number of regional organizations, including at the Lusaka summit of the Organization of African Unity, the twenty-eighth ministerial session of the Organization of the Islamic Conference held at Bamako, and the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States held at Cairo earlier this year.

Our gratitude goes to the members of those organizations and to others that have shown solidarity with us from the outset for standing on the side of right. We call on all Members of the United Nations that support right and justice to take the necessary action to meet the demands of those organizations. The first is the immediate release of Mr. Al Megrahi, who was convicted for political reasons that have nothing to do with the law. His continued detention amounts to hostage-taking under all relevant laws and customs.

The second element of those demands is categorical rejection of the stubborn blockage of the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Libya, which ignores the provisions of paragraph 16 of Security Council 883 (1993) and the findings of the report of the Secretary-General in that regard. The Security Council

should immediately, totally and permanently lift the sanctions imposed on Libya, in view of the fact that Libya has met all the requirements of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1192 (1998). The third element is support for the legitimate right of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to receive fair compensation for the material and human losses it has incurred as a result of the sanctions.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to The Honourable Phil Goff, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand.

Mr. Goff (New Zealand): May I first express my condolences to the families and friends of those who died in this morning's air crash. This was a tragedy in a city that has already seen more than its share of tragedy in recent times.

We meet in New York at this session of the General Assembly under the shadow of terrorist attacks on this city just two months ago. We mourn the lives of nearly 5,000 people from 79 countries who, having done nothing to deserve that fate, died in the attack. The scale, premeditation, coordination and indifference to mass murder that characterize this attack represent a new age of terrorism. It is a terrorism that appears to set no limit to its consequences. Those responsible for it foreshadow a willingness to use biological, chemical and nuclear weapons of mass destruction. The potentially catastrophic effects if they are able to carry out that threat demand an urgent and comprehensive response to pre-empt any such action.

We cannot allow the rule of terror to replace the rule of law. We cannot tolerate the damage that terrorism has already done to the global economy. We cannot allow terror to threaten basic human rights to life and security.

New Zealand welcomes the lead by the United Nations in coordinating an effective and enduring response to terrorism. Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), adopted unanimously, sets out a blueprint for action which every Member State has an obligation to implement. Its emphasis is on measures to close off financial support and the provision of refuge for terrorist groups in every country of the world. International cooperation in imposing these measures and bringing the terrorists to justice will, in the longer term, lie at the heart of the campaign to defeat terrorism.

Removing the immediate threat posed by terrorists such as those in Al Qaeda and those who harbour them will, however, require more than resolutions. Time and again over the past three years, the Security Council has called on the Taliban to prevent the use of Afghanistan by terrorists to launch strikes against other countries. Those resolutions and the sanctions that accompanied them have been ignored by the Taliban. Where groups operate beyond the rule of law and countries put themselves outside of international codes of behaviour, the use of force becomes a necessary part of our response.

Multilateral action and cooperation on a wider front are also necessary if we are to be successful in removing the threat of terrorism on an ongoing and lasting basis. Comprehensive action is needed to minimize the threat of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons falling into the hands of extremist groups. No State should develop, test and hold weapons of this nature. Such weapons are a threat to humanity. Their use by States would destroy and otherwise harm innocent human beings as certainly as did the actions of the terrorist group that attacked New York.

Nations yet to sign and ratify the United Nations Conventions on Chemical and Biological Weapons and treaties to ban mines and inhumane weapons must do so. Nations must equally commit themselves to the elimination of nuclear weapons, the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and an immediate start to negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The attack of 11 September should also encourage all nations to ratify the Rome Statute to bring into effect the International Criminal Court as a forum for pursuing action against those responsible for crimes against humanity.

Suppression of terrorism must also involve action to deal with its causes. States must consider whether the suppression of dissident or minority groups rather than allowing legitimate channels to voice dissent leaves resort to force as the only option.

The events of 11 September should encourage all countries and organizations, particularly those directly involved, to renew efforts to find a just and peaceful solution to the Middle East crisis. To achieve a peaceful solution between Palestinians and Israelis requires good will and flexibility on both sides. There can be no double standards in how the principles of

human rights, freedom and social and economic opportunity are applied to all peoples.

One consequence of the campaign against terrorism has been to bring the world's attention to the situation in Afghanistan. Afghanistan reminds us that where a vacuum is created by the absence of legitimate government and the rule of law, it will be filled by extremist elements, criminal groups dealing in drug trafficking and terrorist organizations, all of which can operate with impunity.

The international community has for too long been indifferent to the situation in Afghanistan and to the long-standing refugee crisis that has resulted from 22 years of war, from famine and from Taliban oppression. Pakistan and Iran have carried the burden of 3.6 million refugees, while much of the world showed concern only when a handful of those refugees in desperation sought to enter other countries illegally. Too little concern has been shown internationally to the 300,000 Afghan children who have died annually from preventable causes. One in three children in refugee camps die before they reach the age of five. The groups now protesting against military intervention were silent while this human catastrophe was unfolding over the last few years.

Any loss of innocent life in conflict is tragic, and extraordinary measures must be taken to avoid it. But a failure to remove the Taliban regime and a failure to assist the Afghan people to put in place a broad-based, moderate and stable Government to replace the Taliban will mean the ongoing loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and the continued suffering of the Afghan people.

Renewed efforts are needed through United Nations agencies to provide emergency relief to people within Afghanistan and in the refugee camps to avoid unnecessary loss of life through the winter and in the months to come. The United Nations must stand ready to assist Afghanistan to rebuild itself once the conflict is over, working with as broad a coalition of Afghan groups as is possible to create a viable political, economic and social infrastructure.

Resolving the problems that have forced so many millions of people from their homes is fundamental to solving the growing refugee crisis. In Afghanistan and elsewhere, people flee their homelands through fear of death or persecution, or because of poverty and lack of opportunity.

In a world made smaller by advances in communication and transport, no State can ignore the plight in other countries or expect not to face consequences from unacceptable discrepancies in wealth, opportunity and human rights standards.

Suppression of criminal organizations responsible for people trafficking is a challenge which demands increased international cooperation. Those who profit from people's desperation and who, once paid, are careless as to whether or not their human cargo survives must be stamped out. However, removing the causes of people fleeing from their countries remains fundamental.

New Zealand's own region of the Pacific has not been immune from violence and instability. In recent years, we have seen conflict in East Timor, violence between Government and separatist movements within Indonesia and in Bougainville, ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands and a coup that overthrew a legitimate Government in Fiji.

Problems remain in the region, but there have been notable areas of improvement. A peace settlement has been signed in Bougainville. Fiji has held democratic elections. Indonesia is seeking to resolve separatist conflict by offering greater autonomy. In East Timor, there have been free elections, and that country will gain independence as the first new nation of the twenty-first century in May 2002. International cooperation and a capable transitional administration by the United Nations have achieved a remarkable transformation in a poor and devastated country. I congratulate the Security Council on its endorsement of the Secretary-General's concept for a post-independence United Nations presence in East Timor to consolidate what has been achieved.

In acknowledging the role of United Nations personnel, I would also stress the need to ensure their proper protection in situations which are often dangerous. The murder of United Nations relief workers in Atambua, West Timor, and the failure to bring to account those fully responsible are a reminder that more must be done to protect our United Nations personnel. We endorse the Secretary-General's recommendations on extending the legal protection for United Nations and other personnel involved in humanitarian operations.

It is timely at this General Assembly to stress the importance of the role of the United Nations. The

critical wars of the twenty-first century will not be won by single nations, however powerful, or even by coalitions. It is the United Nations acting collectively which will win the wars against terrorism, poverty and disease; threats to the environment; and the threats posed by conflict and weapons of mass destruction. The commitments made by heads of State and Government in the United Nations Millennium Declaration last year take on even greater relevance following the events of 11 September.

However, for the United Nations to achieve its potential, it must undergo reform. To prevent the General Assembly and the Secretariat from becoming overwhelmed by so many tasks that they fail to be effective in tackling any of them, we need to prioritize our agenda and to be more selective.

The Security Council needs reform. Its membership should be expanded to reflect contemporary realities, but without maintaining or extending the veto. Countries contributing to peacekeeping operations should be afforded greater involvement in the Council's decision-making with respect to those operations. Peacekeeping operations must be sufficiently resourced.

The capacity of the United Nations for rapid reaction must be strengthened. New Zealand is ready to enter into discussions on a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations on its participation in the standby arrangements system. This is consistent with New Zealand's long-standing readiness to contribute to peacekeeping operations and its current involvement in more than 12 such operations, including its commitment since 1999 of a battalion to help ensure the success of the United Nations operation in East Timor.

The United Nations was founded after the Second World War to build a world free from poverty, violence and the violation of human rights. Nations committed themselves to a collective response to problems that could not be solved by countries individually. Countries agreed on rules of international behaviour.

No one would claim that the United Nations has an unblemished record of success. But without it, the world would be a much less secure place, much less able to confront the difficulties which we face. Let this fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly reaffirm our commitment to work collectively to defeat terrorism, conflict, poverty and disease, and set the agenda for peace, development and respect for human rights for all.

The Acting President: I call on Her Excellency Ms. Lydie Polfer, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Luxembourg.

Ms. Polfer (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): First, I should like to express our very sincere condolences and sense of compassion to the families of the victims of the tragic accident that occurred this morning, as well as to the authorities of the City and State of New York, which have been so seriously affected by the terrorist attacks on 11 September.

I should, however, like to congratulate our President, Mr. Han Seung-soo. I am convinced that with the cooperation of Member States, he will be able to conduct this Assembly in a way to ensure that it responds ambitiously and effectively to the challenges before it.

President Holkeri conducted the Millennium Assembly deftly, wisely exercising his presidential authority and evincing a soothing sense of humour. We would like to thank him for that.

Our Secretary-General tirelessly continues his work to promote international peace and security. Member States wish to thank him for the imagination and wisdom shown as he discharges his lofty responsibility, and they have renewed his term of office. International public opinion has expressed its gratitude for his exceptional commitment by giving him, together with the United Nations, the Nobel Peace Prize. We would like to associate ourselves with that tribute. We congratulate him and wish him the best in his difficult work at the head of the Organization.

In the course of this first session of the twenty-first century, the General Assembly has begun its work under the sign of terrorism. The indescribable crime that was committed on 11 September 2001 against the United States of America and its citizens, male and female, represents a breakdown in international relations. It was not only America that was targeted by this infamous attack against the World Trade Center towers — it was our lifestyle in an open, democratic, tolerant and multicultural society to which the broad majority of countries and peoples represented here aspire. That is unbearable to terrorists.

Civilian airplanes have become guided missiles through blind and murderous terrorism, and as a result we all feel attacked. We can't call this a confrontation here between civilizations, combat between North and South, between religions. The perpetrators of the repugnant attack of 11 September wish to deny by their act the very values that form the basis of the international community, which we have endeavoured to build for the past 50 years through the United Nations and its multilateral system.

The subsequent discussion in public opinion has shown that our societies do not yet know each other well enough. Ignorance leads to distrust and even hostility, promoting a chilling self-absorption. Dialogue among civilizations, as promoted and practised by our Organization, must now more than ever be at the forefront of our considerations.

Having expressed its compassion for the innocent victims of those cowardly attacks, the international community must now react with determination to ensure that the perpetrators receive the punishment they deserve and to defend itself in such a way as to prevent such acts in the future. I should like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our solidarity with the United States of America in its exercise of its legitimate right to self-defence.

Two days ago, the current President of the European Union, Mr. Louis Michel, gave a detailed description of the measures and initiatives taken by the 15 member States to combat the scourge of terrorism. Luxembourg is participating unreservedly in this joint effort.

Only through coordinated and interdisciplinary work will we be able to fight all forms of terrorism. Our response must be commensurate with the threat, while respecting the fundamental freedoms of the citizen — a principle that underlies our civilization.

With regard to the situation in Afghanistan, we must work under the auspices of the United Nations with a view to promoting the emergence of a stable and legitimate Government that is representative of the Afghan population as a whole. Such a Government must respect the human rights of the Afghan people and develop good-neighbourly relations with all the countries of the region. In that context, I should like to welcome in particular the activities of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Mr. Brahimi.

As soon as its objective has been achieved, the international community, through the concerted efforts of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international organizations, should set up an ambitious programme that is both political and humanitarian, with a view to helping to reconstruct Afghanistan and to ensure its integration within a stabilized region. Such an effort will require intensified political dialogue with all of the countries of the region.

At this time, the provision of assistance to the civilian population in Afghanistan and to the refugees across its borders is a matter of priority. My country has already raised almost 7 million euros for that purpose as part of a comprehensive effort within the European Union amounting to more than 320 million euros.

Although there are no grounds for making a direct connection between the events of 11 September and the situation in the Middle East, the situation there is becoming increasingly worrying. We note that, unfortunately, the fabric that was woven during 10 years of mediation efforts and that was almost completed at Taba is now unravelling before our eyes. During my recent visit to the region, I noted the extent to which the peace process, which has been deadlocked for far too long, is suffering from the absence of any real prospects and from increasing distrust among the parties.

That is why, together with our colleagues from the European Union, we are stepping up our efforts to convince the parties that only the cessation of violence and the recognition of two States will make it possible for negotiations to resume that can lead to a just and lasting peace in the region, on the basis of the establishment of a Palestinian State and the right of Israel to live in peace and security. The European Union stands ready to provide a framework for this process, in cooperation with the United States of America and the Arab States of the region, and to assist the parties with a view to facilitating the reconciliation that is necessary.

In the meantime, the United Nations will tirelessly pursue its efforts to achieve international peace and stability. In 2001, four reports of the Secretary-General — dealing with peacekeeping, humanitarian action, the prevention of conflict and the follow-up to the Millennium Summit — have shown

the way forward. They show that it is necessary for the international community to be steadfast in its commitment to the prevention and management of conflict.

Any hesitation or fleeting expression of disinterest might risk encouraging elements that may want to aggressively defend their own interests without regard for the consequences at the national or international level. Europe has witnessed such dramatic chains of events, particularly in the Balkans, and we can only feel a sense of humility when considering their disastrous effects.

If this year the United Nations has not been on the front line in the Balkans, it has been working hard in the area of peacekeeping. I would like to make two comments about these operations. First, we note that there has been a considerable improvement in the quality of their management, following the conclusions of the Brahimi report. Secondly, there has been an international commitment to deal with hotbeds of tension as diverse and complex as those of Kosovo, East Timor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone.

The balance sheet is relatively encouraging. Kosovo will soon be holding elections that will have important consequences for the future of the province. The United Nations operation in East Timor can, perhaps, be viewed as a clear success for international action. Attempts to restructure peacekeeping operations have been promoted through careful consideration in the Secretariat, the Security Council and the General Assembly, based upon an outstanding follow-up report.

The complexity of crisis situations often, of course, demands a prudent response, even when real progress has been made, as is the case in Sierra Leone. It is even more important to document international determination through clear mandates that allow for a strong response. We believe that the inclusion of troop-contributing countries in the decision-making process is essential. The increasingly integrated approach that has been chosen, as illustrated by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, is designed to ensure a logical succession between the phases of prevention, peacekeeping and, finally, consolidation, reconstruction and development.

One of the most urgent tasks of our Organization is to provide immediate assistance for civilian populations that are the victims of natural disasters or crises brought about by human intervention. Luxembourg attaches particular importance to such needs, and we are endeavouring to support United Nations offices in this physically and morally demanding task. Since the fall of 2000, we have been coordinating, on an informal basis, the donor countries in New York, and our delegation takes pleasure in noting the dedication of the competent officials and authorities who head these services. I would like to assure the Assembly that my country is clearly aware of the need to protect, and ensure the safety of, personnel.

Humanitarian action, prevention, ceasefire agreements and peace-building activities hardly constitute the entire agenda of the international community. A functioning democracy is a major asset in progress towards development, as I have already emphasized. I need only reaffirm the importance of national efforts to combat corruption and foster the establishment, within our societies, of the rule of law based on an equitable and properly functioning legal system.

My country welcomes the efforts under way within the United Nations to put an end to impunity and to ensure that those responsible for committing crimes against humanity and other atrocities answer for their actions within an international criminal jurisdiction.

A special tribunal to judge crimes committed during the course of the civil war is in the process of being established in Sierra Leone, and Luxembourg has made a financial contribution to its establishment. In Cambodia, a law to establish a tribunal to consider the atrocities and genocide perpetrated under the dictatorship of the Khmer Rouge is now in force, and we must assess its compatibility with the memorandum proposed by the United Nations. The Tribunals in The Hague and Arusha have stepped up their work, and, for the first time, a former head of State is awaiting his trial in prison. We welcome these developments, as well as those who have joined us in the group of countries that have ratified the Rome Statute of the future International Criminal Court. The citizens of Luxembourg would be pleased to see that convention enter into force as soon as possible and acceded to by a broad majority of States.

In September 2000, heads of State and Government met here in New York. Since then, the Millennium Declaration has underpinned the actions of the United Nations and of States at the national level. Together with its European partners, Luxembourg has affirmed its dedication to the commitments entered into there.

I conclude by citing two facts that illustrate the awareness of my country's Government of the responsibilities its shares with all here in preparing for the future of coming generations. First, official development assistance from Luxembourg has reached 0.71 per cent of our gross national product; the Government has decided to raise it to 1 per cent by 2005. I have also submitted to my country's Chamber of Deputies Luxembourg's first nomination to serve as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Benaissa, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco.

Mr. Benaissa (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo, on behalf of the Kingdom of Morocco, on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session and to offer him our full support as he carries out his important task. I also take this opportunity to thank and congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Harri Holkeri, on the effective and decisive manner in which he conducted the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

I also pay tribute to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for all his efforts in serving the Organization and the international community as a whole and I congratulate him sincerely on his re-election to his post and on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for 2001.

We have all been struck and shaken by the heinous terrorist acts that took place on 11 September in the United States. They were an attack upon thousands of innocent lives and a clear violation of all the religious, humanitarian and cultural values that we hold dear. Whatever our attitude towards and evaluation of those events may be, international relations have taken a different turn and a fateful outlook since that day. Those events were epic in their resonance and the extent of their repercussions is not yet clear. One thing is clear, however: we will have to face new challenges and new constraints. Morocco reaffirms its full condemnation of these actions and calls on all countries to mobilize their efforts to eradicate terrorism at its very roots. Terrorism represents a threat not merely to international peace and security, but to the human race as a whole.

We believe that the United Nations is the most appropriate institution for investigating the deepest causes of terrorism, not least because of the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly establishing a unified and comprehensive set of guidelines on this wide-ranging subject. That is why we call on all competent bodies to do everything possible to fulfil their responsibilities for combating or preventing terrorism. Morocco is a multi-ethnic State founded on tolerance, equality and respect for international law. It will contribute fully to the fight against the scourge of terrorism and its dangers.

It is absolutely clear that the question of the Middle East is one of the most serious regional conflicts that the world has experienced in the past 50 years. Recently, we have seen a dangerous escalation in the conflict that has taken hundreds of lives, including those of many women and children, and undermined the infrastructure and services of the occupied territories of Palestine. Morocco has therefore condemned the attacks and called for a lifting of the siege of Palestinian towns and villages, where homes, schools and fields have been bulldozed. The forced colonization of Palestinian areas occupied since 1967 must come to an end. We must break the vicious cycle of violence and reprisals, and return to the negotiating table on the basis of the conclusions of the Mitchell report and signed agreements between Israel and the Palestinians.

Morocco feels that peace between the Arabs and Israelis will have to entail an Israeli withdrawal from all the land occupied since 1967 in Palestine and the Syrian Golan Heights and that part of the territory of Lebanon that remains under Israeli occupation. This must take place on the basis of full compliance with international law, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the decisions of the Madrid Conference, which called for an exchange of land for peace. In this context, we heard with satisfaction the statement made by President Bush concerning the establishment of a Palestinian State and the expression of the will of the United States Administration to resume its active role in reviving the peace process in order to achieve a just, lasting,

comprehensive and genuine peace for all the peoples and States of the region.

Morocco takes this opportunity to reiterate its concern over the suffering of the brotherly people of Iraq and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in that country. These are direct results of the economic sanctions that have been imposed on that nation for the past 10 years and more. Morocco hopes that the talks under way between the United Nations and the Government of Iraq will help towards the lifting of the sanctions and put an end to the despair, pain and suffering of the Iraqi people.

Morocco welcomes all the efforts to be made by the United Nations and the Iraqi Government in the dialogue, which will be held in confidence and frankness, to find a just solution to the problem of detainees and people missing since the Gulf War. Morocco supports both the independence and sovereignty of Kuwait and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq itself.

The settlement of armed conflicts is also of crucial importance to Africa, which, unfortunately, is still being plagued by bloody but entirely contrived confrontations. What is happening in Africa requires our Organization to adopt a new and pragmatic approach enabling us to maintain and strengthen peace in Africa on the basis of respect for ceasefires and the encouragement of dialogue between the parties, and confidence-building. We need to provide for preventive action, as stated by the Secretary-General at the opening of this session of the General Assembly. We need early warning mechanisms for areas of tension. If we have such mechanisms, then we will be able to deal with the deep causes of conflict, like injustice, poverty, epidemics and refugees.

Morocco, which is eager to support peace and security in Africa, welcomes all efforts undertaken in this area by the United Nations and international and regional organizations. Morocco, as always, has responded this year to the United Nations request for troops from the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces to participate in the international peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Kingdom of Morocco is determined to expedite the process of constructing the Arab Mahgreb Union as a strong and balanced regional organization that will lead to permanent stability in the region and strengthen economic, social and cultural institutions. It would also enter into fruitful partnership with other regional organizations, including the European Union. Morocco remains convinced that such a Union is inevitable and most useful.

The efforts to establish a Mahgreb organization, however, depend upon finding an enduring, just and final solution to the problem of the Sahara. The conflict there is a stumbling block preventing the fulfilment of the hopes of the peoples of the Mahgreb for good relations, complementarity, stability, prosperity and peace. It is these hopes that have guided us since independence, especially since the historic conference in Tangiers in 1958. Although some claim otherwise, the settlement plan did not come to a halt because of the huge number of challenges following the identification process, but because of the huge difficulties mentioned by the Secretary-General himself in his last three reports to the Security Council.

Finally — and again contrary to the claims of some — the Security Council, in resolution 1359 (2001), requested the four parties concerned in the Sahara conflict to begin negotiations on the basis of the framework agreement tabled by the Secretary-General in the Security Council and known as the Baker plan. In fact, the initiative of the Secretary-General, enshrined in the draft framework agreement, is aimed at a negotiated settlement of the conflict. As the Secretary-General himself put it, this is a last chance to reach a speedy and final settlement in the Sahara conflict. Morocco accepted the draft framework agreement as a basis for negotiation, and is ready to continue cooperating with the Security Council, the Secretary-General and his personal representative, Mr. James Baker, in order to achieve a just, peaceful and final settlement of the Sahara issue.

In keeping with international law and the Charter, Morocco invites all other parties to provide the same positive response to the appeal contained in Security Council resolution 1359 (2001) to start negotiations in order to achieve a political solution of this totally contrived conflict.

The fact that Spain continues to occupy two Moroccan cities, Ceuta and Melilla, and the islands off the coast of Morocco that are near them, is a pure anachronism and totally out of line with the values and principles upheld by the international community. Morocco, which would like to see a European-Mediterranean community and dialogue between the

two shores of the Mediterranean, considers that a good relationship based on cooperation and good neighbourliness with Spain is one of our basic strategic goals. However, if we are to achieve that goal, Spain will have to show an understanding of and good faith towards Morocco's rightful claims on Ceuta and Melilla and the islands off the coast of Morocco, so that Moroccan sovereignty over this territory can be exercised, with full guarantees for the economic, social and cultural rights of the Spanish residents of these two cities. There have been similar precedents, in places like Hong Kong and Macao. Thus, we can refer to such previous settlements that will be in the interests of both Morocco and Spain.

Changes in the world economy make it essential for Mediterranean countries to give their economic relationships a strong impetus based on new concepts and approaches. That is why Morocco has tabled very ambitious projects with some of the other countries in the eastern and southern Mediterranean regions.

There is the initiative of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, known as the Agadir declaration of 8 May 2001, which provides for the enlargement of the free-trade zone that now exists on the basis of agreements between Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia. The ideas for this free-trade area to be enlarged with the involvement of other Arab Mediterranean States form a solid basis for the States on the south and east coasts of the Mediterranean to integrate in a framework of partnership and cooperation, as under the Barcelona Declaration, involving countries on the north shore of the Mediterranean and the European Union in general.

International peace and security do not depend only on responses to political challenges. They also depend on social and economic problems. We specifically cite problems of the environment and lack of natural resources, where there are so many challenges facing our planet, not least of which is access to water and drinking water at a reasonable price. My country had the honour of contributing to this cause at the seventh Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention, which took place in Marrakech between 29 October and 9 November 2001. This Conference resulted in positive steps on the way towards an international conference on sustainable development to be held in Johannesburg next year.

With regard to the social issues that are of concern to international organizations, the Kingdom of Morocco considers that the United Nations should increase its efforts to benefit children, because they are the future of the human race. The Kingdom of Morocco, upon the recommendation and leadership of its sovereign, His Majesty Mohammed VI and their Royal Highnesses Prince Moulay Rachid and Princess Lalla Meriem, has spared no effort at the regional and international levels to ensure the success of the Global Movement for Children. Morocco has in this regard organized three important conferences on children this year aimed at mobilizing all possible resources — regional, Arab and African — in order to make sure that children enjoy their rights to health, education and justice. Based on such convictions, Morocco is determined to effectively contribute to the success of the special session on children to be held next year.

For the second time in 10 years, our Organization has received the Nobel Peace Prize, which is both an honour and a burden. An honour for its success in preventing wars and in settling disputes peacefully; and a burden because it leads to rethinking the role of the Organization so it can become an effective tool in responding to the new challenges and so it can fulfil its goals of building a world in which peace and security prevail and in which all peoples of the world can harvest the fruits of technological and scientific advances. Let us therefore rise to the level of such challenges and engage in a true partnership and solid visionary outlook so we can achieve these noble objectives.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mikhail M. Khvostov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Mr. Khvostov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of Belarus would like to express its deepest sympathy to the families of the victims of the plane crash that occurred this morning in New York, as well as to the Governments of the United States and the Dominican Republic.

My delegation would also like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on his election to that responsible post. His election is undoubtedly clear recognition of the Republic of Korea's role in international affairs. We would also like to express our gratitude to the President of the General Assembly at the previous session,

Mr. Harri Holkeri. His successful presidency of the Millennium Summit and Assembly is a clear example of his personal talent and leadership skills.

The United Nations is entering the new century under the leadership of Mr. Kofi Annan. His unanimous re-election by the General Assembly to a second five-year term came as an unequivocal acknowledgement of great appreciation for his work as Secretary-General. We welcome the recent well-founded decision by the International Nobel Committee to grant the Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations, and to Mr. Kofi Annan personally.

The consequences of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 against New York and Washington, D.C., are as present and as painful as ever. In that regard, our country does not consider this session of the General Assembly just a regular event in the life of the United Nations. For Belarus, the point is that, as Member States, all of us must demonstrate collective wisdom and display the collective will to make our world less vulnerable in the face of acts of insanity that push not only individual countries but the whole of humanity to the very edge of a global catastrophe.

As a responsible member of the international community, the Republic of Belarus cannot remain indifferent to this threat. In his message to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka, clearly explained the views of our country with regard to international activities to combat terrorism:

> "In the present situation, the role of the United Nations in consolidating the efforts of States in the fight against terrorism is growing in stature. We can achieve real success in this effort only when the unique capabilities of the United Nations are used, especially as regards eradicating the root causes that generate and support terrorism. We believe that the United Nations should be at the centre of the efforts to develop strategies and tactics for the measures to be taken by the international community to combat terrorism."

Having actively supported all the anti-terrorist resolutions adopted by the Security Council and General Assembly, and being party to the 12 United Nations conventions on terrorism, Belarus welcomes the measures aimed at defining and eradicating not only terrorism itself but also its root causes. We firmly support the work of the Committee established by the Security Council under resolution 1373 (2001), and are ready to cooperate closely with that body.

Last year, during the Millennium Summit and Assembly, we called for the preservation of the United Nations as a unique universal international institution uniting all the countries of the world. When we talk about establishing the conditions necessary for effective implementation of the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration we are talking about the future of the Organization itself. We believe that the implementation by the United Nations of the provisions of the Millennium Declaration during the first year after the holding of the Millennium Summit is cause for a certain optimism. In that regard, I would like to underscore that the Republic of Belarus has already drafted a special governmental programme on implementing the Millennium Declaration.

The important thing that we have come to realize is that there is an organic link between development, peace and security in the context of globalization. The recent tragic events in the United States of America reaffirmed that interdependence. Belarus welcomes the intensive work undertaken at the United Nations in 2001 in preparation for the International Conference on Financing for Development. We are convinced that this forum must lay the foundation for a new international consensus on global economic and financial issues. Belarus believes that such a consensus should be built while taking into consideration the specific interests and needs of countries at different stages of social and economic development. The overall success of the forum will ultimately depend on the application of that approach.

While addressing the most pressing social and economic challenges of the modern world, we must not weaken our focus on the area of international security and disarmament. The statistics on military expenditures, which have reached $800 billion per year worldwide, are of particular concern in the present alarming international situation. It should be noted that our country has been pursuing a consistent policy in the field of disarmament. We have made a significant contribution to the consolidation and development of international non-proliferation regimes for weapons of mass destruction, including a reduction in the number of such weapons and the elimination of existing arsenals.

Belarus has been consistently and comprehensively fulfilling the provisions of all nuclear disarmament treaties to which our country is a party. The recent concluding inspection under the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles, which was carried out in Belarus in February 2001, confirmed our country's strict observance of all the conditions envisaged in that document. As a nation that voluntary relinquished possession of nuclear weapons and completely withdrew them from its territory in 1996, Belarus is determined to advocate the necessity of providing legally binding guarantees to non-nuclear States, including the elaboration of an appropriate international convention to that end.

The Republic of Belarus is among the States that consider the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to be a critical component of maintaining strategic stability. The outcome of decades of tense negotiations in the search for a compromise that saved the world from a growing nuclear threat must not be dismissed. Strategic stability is a practical imperative for each and every State without exception. Negotiations on such an important issue should be conducted on a multilateral, non-bloc basis with the participation of all interested States and in strict conformity with the provisions of the Charter.

We welcome the efforts undertaken for the universal prohibition of chemical weapons and support the destruction, as soon as possible, of existing arsenals of weapons-grade poisons, as well as the efforts to achieve the universality of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. This summer Belarus concluded its agreement with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on the privileges and immunities of that organization.

We also pursue a similarly responsible and consistent policy with regard to reducing conventional weapons. In strict implementation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, Belarus was among the first of the parties to that Treaty to ratify the agreement on the adaptation of the Treaty. Ratification by the Republic of Belarus of the Treaty on Open Skies in 2001 is proof of our consistent policy in this field.

One important dimension of our foreign policy is to make practical contributions to the strengthening of regional stability, based on the principle of comprehensive and mutually beneficial cooperation with neighbouring countries in all areas relevant to security and disarmament. As part of this policy, Belarus has concluded an agreement with Lithuania on measures for strengthening confidence and transparency, and we are making progress towards signing similar agreements with Ukraine and Poland.

Conflict prevention remains among the most important issues on the agenda of the United Nations. The events of the past year have proved that the initiatives undertaken by the United Nations, together with the active personal involvement of the Secretary-General and complemented by the work of regional organizations and individual United Nations Member States, have been an effective — and very often the only — solution to the escalation of conflicts in various regions of the world.

This is the appropriate point to mention the situation in Afghanistan, which is of particular concern to the international community. Developments in that country and in the region as a whole run the risk of spiraling out of control. Military force cannot resolve complex problems that have been building up for years. We are convinced that the complex tensions within Afghan society can be defused only by means of a balanced domestic dialogue based on strict compliance with the standards of international law.

It is essential not to weaken the intensifying political effort to give a new impetus to the peace process in the Middle East. There is no alternative to the peaceful establishment of an independent Palestinian State through political negotiations, based on the strict observance of Security Council resolutions already adopted and the decisions of other relevant international forums. It is regrettable that the Security Council was unable to reach consensus on a United Nations presence in the region at this crucial moment. We consider it extremely important that we continue our efforts to settle unresolved problems on the Lebanese track, in tandem with the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Golan Heights.

We are also concerned about the situation in Kosovo and Macedonia as the result of aggressive separatism and international terrorism. Here, too, we believe that political logic must prevail over the logic of force. On the eve of the forthcoming general election in Kosovo, Belarus confirms its adherence to the principle of the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and supports the diplomatic

initiative by the Russian Federation legally to confirm the existing national borders in the Balkans.

The situation in Africa continues to remain unstable. We believe that the establishment of the African Union and the further strengthening of other African regional structures, with an effective United Nations involvement, are important prerequisites for the maintenance of peace and stability in that continent. A comprehensive approach envisaging integration of the political, economic and social resources of the African States is of crucial importance. Belarus supports the immediate implementation of all the decisions taken at the Summit of the Organization of African Unity held in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2001.

It is important to maintain the momentum that has been created in the political process leading to statehood for East Timor and to its admission, as a fully fledged member, into the world family of nations.

We must encourage the active efforts being undertaken to continue dialogue, on the basis of equality, between North and South Korea.

The Cyprus problem continues to be a pressing issue. We call for the resumption of negotiations on this question, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The Republic of Belarus has been increasing its participation in major United Nations international legal instruments in a number of strategically important areas. These include the combat against organized crime and drug trafficking. Belarus has signed the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, as well as the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air.

Beyond that, the Republic of Belarus has become a party to the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the Protocol Amending the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs.

The current session of the General Assembly represents an important stage in the process of establishing a legal framework for Belarus to join the United Nations system of peacekeeping operations. On 1 October 2001, the Republic of Belarus signed a memorandum of understanding with the Secretariat regarding its participation in the United Nations Standby Arrangements System. We see the recent visit of representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to Belarus to test and select Belarusian candidates for United Nations civilian police contingents as an important initial step in the process of implementing this memorandum.

Of major importance in the Millennium Declaration is the promotion by Member States of the principles of sustainable development. It remains clear, however, that implementation of the paradigm of sustainable development in many developing countries and in countries with economies in transition continues to be confronted with major difficulties.

In this regard, we attach particular importance to preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg in 2002. We consider the Rio + 10 Summit to be an appropriate forum for defining new approaches to the solution of global problems and for developing new and effective financial, institutional and legal mechanisms for their implementation.

The current session of the General Assembly is of fundamental importance to my country, since it will consider issues relating to the cleanup of the consequences of the disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The economic, social and humanitarian ramifications of this problem cannot be overestimated. Suffice it to mention here just one figure: over the past decade, Belarus has spent $12.5 billion on the cleanup of the Chernobyl disaster. However, the people living in the contaminated areas have not yet been able to return to their normal way of life. There is a need further to rally international support for my country's efforts to mitigate and minimize the aftermath of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

In this context, we greatly appreciate the initiatives proposed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, to intensify international post-Chernobyl cooperation, including shifting its focus towards assistance for sustainable development of the contaminated areas and enhancing the region's human potential. The findings and outcome of the special United Nations assessment mission to the three most affected States earlier this

year are expected significantly to contribute to the understanding of what precisely should be done in the near future. In the course of the current session of the General Assembly, a draft resolution entitled "Strengthening of International Cooperation and Coordination of Efforts to Study, Mitigate and Minimize the Consequences of the Chernobyl Disaster" has jointly been submitted by the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. I call upon all delegations to support it.

In his road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, observed quite rightly that

> "The international community has just emerged from an era of commitment. It must now enter an era of implementation." (*A/56/326, para. 11*)

This means that the successful implementation of the Organization's strategy in this era of globalization depends on us, as United Nations Member States, and us alone. This is not only our common privilege; it is also our common responsibility.

Belarus is confident that the United Nations and the international community are capable of mobilizing political will and technological and intellectual resources for the sake of building a stable and prosperous world.

For the Republic of Belarus, the tenth anniversary of its independence coincided with the second presidential elections in the history of my country. The support of the overwhelming majority of voters for Mr. Alyaksandr Lukashenka confirmed the soundness of the democratic foundations of the Belarusian society.

Similarly, the foreign policy of our country will remain consistent and constructive. It will be guided exclusively by the basic principles of the United Nations Charter and universally recognized norms of international law, including the aspiration for the establishment of a world order in which the interests of all countries, big and small, developed and developing, in both the North and the South, are equitably taken into account. Cooperation with all United Nations Member States on a mutually beneficial and constructive basis will remain the central priority for the Republic of Belarus.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Brian Cowen, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland.

Mr. Cowen (Ireland): I congratulate the President on his election as President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly and thank him for his successful efforts to take forward the work of this Assembly. My colleague, Foreign Minister Louis Michel of Belgium, has already addressed this General Assembly on behalf of the European Union. Ireland associates itself fully with his remarks.

We meet at a moment of uncertainty. The spectre of war once again casts its shadow across the continents. Forty years ago, when addressing the Assembly, President John F. Kennedy warned: "Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind." Of course, President Kennedy was addressing a different world from the one we now live in. The war he feared was a war between two great power blocs that would end in assured mutual annihilation.

Thankfully, the threat of conflict on such a scale is now a far more remote prospect, but war and conflict continue to cause enormous suffering in many parts of the world. This, together with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction — nuclear, chemical and biological — means that war and its mutation, terrorism, continue to threaten mankind — our lives, our liberty and our prosperity.

This is simply not acceptable. We, the peoples of the United Nations, created, joined and sustained this Organization in the determination to save this and succeeding generations from the scourge of war. We must now demonstrate renewed and sustained commitment to the realization of this goal.

Many speakers in this debate have spoken about the events of 11 September as a defining moment in history. During the twentieth century, we faced a number of such defining moments — the First World War, the Second World War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which heralded the end of the cold war. These defining moments are perhaps best reflected in the popular phrase found on the lips of men and women of all races and creeds at such times: "Things will never be the same again." Out of such defining moments there comes the resolve to learn the lessons of history, to change the existing order and to make sure the calamities of the past can never happen again.

In the heat and clarity of the immediate aftermath of such events, expressions of resolve are abundant. And yet, from the examples I have just outlined, it is clear that in the past our resolve has faltered as the immediate threat receded and that the determination required to tackle the underlying causes and injustices that give rise to conflict has proved difficult to sustain.

Today the international community is again at a crossroads. If we want a true and lasting victory over international terrorism; if we want safety, security and prosperity for our own people and our children, then we must act with sustained resolve and sustained determination.

Our immediate agenda is clear. Action against terrorism must be pursued resolutely across a wide front and over a sustained period. In undertaking this necessary endeavour, let us be honest and realistic. With retributive justice must come distributive justice. The peace and security which we crave for ourselves and for future generations will not be secured unless we simultaneously tackle the root causes of conflict: injustice, poverty and the abuse of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Too often, multilateral action has been characterized as reaction to the outcomes of conflict. Last year's Millennium Declaration confirmed the public commitment of the world's leadership to resolving also the root causes of conflict. The United Nations was created out of the determination to tackle conflict and its causes. On that basis, let us this week recommit and rededicate ourselves to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the United Nations. As the Secretary-General pointed out when opening this general debate, "none of the issues that faced us on 10 September has become less urgent".

We must act more resolutely through the United Nations, with sustained commitment and sustained determination, to address this equally urgent agenda. We must implement with determination all Security Council resolutions. Let us realize and build on the pledges we made at the Millennium Summit. Let us strive much more effectively to control the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Let us also improve the working of this Organization by making it more efficient, adaptable and coordinated. In the words of the Secretary-General this week, let us ensure that when the United Nations acts, "only the best is good enough". Only in this way will the United Nations and its Member States succeed in overcoming the massive challenges which now confront us.

In addressing this comprehensive agenda, we must not relax our efforts on human rights. This Organization was founded out of a determination to assert human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women. We must not equivocate on any of these principles. In pursuit of this, Ireland looks forward to the imminent establishment of the International Criminal Court and appeals for its universal recognition.

Violent conflict and internal strife are the reality of daily life in many regions and countries across the world today — the Middle East, the Great Lakes region of Africa and many other places, such as Sudan, where people are being killed and maimed. Ireland has worked hard since joining the Security Council last January to focus on the need to address these and other conflicts. We have given particular attention to Africa and to the efforts, frequently African-led, to solve the many conflicts there. We have consistently sought to highlight the humanitarian aspects of the various situations coming before the Council. We were particularly gratified during our presidency of the Security Council last month to have presided over substantial discussions on Somalia and on the United Nations support for post-independence East Timor.

We remain concerned about the humanitarian situation of the people of Iraq. The Iraqi Government can and must do more within the system set out in the Security Council resolutions to meet the humanitarian needs of its own people. For its part, the Security Council and its members must redouble their efforts to reach agreement on the outcome of its review of the sanctions regime. But we must not lose sight of the fundamental purpose of the sanctions regime: Iraq must allow verification that it has met its essential disarmament obligations.

The Irish Government is grateful to those Member States that supported Ireland's membership in the Security Council. We will continue to strive to vindicate the confidence that you placed in us.

The United Nations role in peacekeeping has been at the heart of our collective endeavours now for over 50 years. Ireland has played a proud part in United Nations peacekeeping across the continents. This evening, I want to take a moment to thank the Irish soldiers who have served with such distinction

and dedication in Lebanon for the last 23 years. The last Irish battalion leaves the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon tomorrow. The people of Ireland are proud of their service and achievements in the cause of peace. I want to pay special tribute to the memory of those soldiers who lost their lives in the service of peace.

Ireland's commitment to United Nations peacekeeping remains undiminished. We continue to participate in about a dozen missions. A new contingent of our troops will soon begin service with the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

We must equally give priority to achieving sustainable development and meeting the humanitarian challenges that confront us. The United Nations Population Fund's 2001 *The State of World Population* report, published last week, reminds us that half of the world's 6.1 billion people still exist on less than $2 per day and forecasts that the world population will rise by 50 per cent, to 9.3 billion, by the year 2050. Is it acceptable that over 3 billion people are today living in total and abject poverty, while the developed world is struggling to come to terms with the problems of over-consumption and environmental pollution? Are we prepared to accept that there could be over 6 billion people living in poverty by 2050?

Let us see every Government set out its commitment to reach the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for development assistance within the next five years. Ireland has already made it clear that it will deliver on its commitment in this regard and will increase its overseas development aid budget by over $100 million next year to keep on track towards this target. Let us reassess the sustainable debt levels and provide additional relief to the heavily indebted poor countries of sub-Saharan Africa, which will suffer the most in the present economic downturn.

Let us redouble our efforts to overcome an HIV/AIDS pandemic which is killing over 6.5 thousand people every day in Africa and which has already orphaned over 9 million children on that continent. The Declaration of Commitment agreed at the General Assembly special session in June has established the framework and the targets. It now has to be financed and implemented.

Let us work harder together to prevent climate change from devastating poor and vulnerable countries.

We have achieved much already. This is recognized by the awarding of this year's Nobel Peace Prize jointly to our Organization and to our esteemed Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. I offer my warmest congratulations and appreciation to Kofi Annan, and to all who serve the United Nations. But the Secretary-General would be the first to emphasize that the award of the Nobel Peace Prize must be seen not only as a recognition of past achievement, but as an inspiration to renewed commitment and determination.

The terrible events of 11 September, which struck most fiercely at the city of New York — seat of the United Nations and melting pot of all races and creeds — brought home to us all that the collective security of the international community is only as strong as its weakest link. As long as a single Government or, in the case of the Taliban, a single de facto administration, is prepared to allow its territory to be used as a base for terrorist attacks against people anywhere on this planet, we can never feel secure.

We must confront and defeat the scourge of international terrorism and bring those responsible for the barbaric acts of 11 September to justice, not out of a need for revenge, but because the perpetrators of these acts are capable of repeating such attacks and make no secret of their determination to do so. They can and must be stopped.

Ireland's position has been steadfast and clear: we stand with the United States and with the rest of the international community in asserting that the barbarism of 11 September cannot be allowed to succeed; that the threat posed by international terrorism must be permanently ended; and that there must be a total commitment by all Governments to this task, with all the energy and resources at our disposal.

My Government hopes that the military campaign now under way will achieve its objectives in as short a time frame as possible. Every effort must continue to be made to avoid civilian casualties, and it is crucial that the military campaign be accompanied by a visible and effective humanitarian strategy. The long-suffering people of Afghanistan deserve no less. There must also be a concerted international effort, coordinated by the United Nations, to assist the people of Afghanistan in establishing a broad-based Government, representative of all the ethnic groups which make up the country. This must be accompanied by a comprehensive and generous programme of support for the post-military

rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan. The international community must stay engaged once a representative Government is established there.

In Ireland, we continue to make steady progress with our own peace process. As representatives will be aware, the British and Irish Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland successfully negotiated a comprehensive peace settlement over three years ago, known as the Good Friday Agreement. Since then, we have worked hard to secure the full implementation of this Agreement.

Two of the most difficult and sensitive issues we have had to face were the putting of paramilitary weapons beyond use and the putting in place of a new beginning to policing. I am very pleased to be able to inform the Assembly that very considerable progress has recently been made on both these crucial issues. As a result, the way is now clear for a sustained, committed and enthusiastic implementation of all elements of the Good Friday Agreement.

We have learned a lot from our own voyage towards peace. We have put in place new constitutional and institutional arrangements, which fully recognize and respect the legitimacy of both political traditions on the island of Ireland. We have established the primacy and full relevance of politics in people's lives in Northern Ireland. We do not pretend, of course, that we have found a solution that has universal application — we know too well how local and individual conflicts can be. But through our own process of trial and error we have learned lessons and established principles that may be useful in resolving conflicts in other parts of the world. From our own experience of peace-building, we enumerate the most important elements of any truly sustainable peace process as follows.

There can be no purely military solution. A lasting settlement must always address the root causes of conflict. Compromise is essential. Recognizing that extremism breeds in the absence of reason, conflict resolution demands that we rehabilitate the concept of compromise. In the context of effective political dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes, peacemakers should not regard compromise as representing appeasement or surrender, victory or defeat. Neither does compromise necessarily require splitting the difference between the parties. A lasting agreement must be comprehensive and address all issues of concern, even if the parties might agree to deal with them in different time frames.

Those in favour of peace in each community must work together, even in the face of hostility from the enemies of the peace process in their own community. They must stick together in adversity. They must avoid excessive and damaging criticism when mistakes are made, as they inevitably will be. They must be prepared to face down the enemies of peace together.

The international community must support the peace process in a balanced and objective way. A successful process needs a route map, such as those already prepared by Mitchell and Tenet in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also needs a mechanism to arbitrate on who is meeting, and who is not meeting, their commitments under any such arrangements.

Those driving the peace process must rise above the politics of the last atrocity. Not doing so, while understandable in terms of domestic opinion, is ultimately bereft of vision and hands control over progress to the enemies of the process. There is a particularly compelling message here for those charged with advancing the peace process in the Middle East. If these elements are present, we believe a peace process can prosper.

As I have already said, there is no "one size fits all" solution to conflict. I believe, however, that if these principles were to be applied in certain other conflict situations, they could make a significant contribution to the achievement of peace and political progress.

The world we seek cannot be brought about overnight. Building peace, ensuring justice, widening respect for fundamental human rights and eliminating poverty will take time. We will require stamina, determination, inspiration, patience, generosity and compromise. We have all these qualities in abundance if only we can find the political will to use them and the determination, together, to seek new ways forward.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fathulla Jameel, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Maldives.

Mr. Jameel (Maldives): It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of my country, to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. His election to that high office

demonstrates the international community's respect for and confidence in his ability to guide the work of this session successfully. It also demonstrates the trust and high regard that the international community has for the Republic of Korea and for the important role that country is playing in the international arena to foster peace and security in the world. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the work of the fifty-fifth session.

Allow me also to congratulate the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, on his reappointment to head the Organization for a second term. His dynamic leadership has earned the United Nations the confidence of the international community and has raised fresh hopes about the Organization's ability to facilitate a world atmosphere more conducive to peace, justice and human dignity as we enter the twenty-first century. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Secretary-General and to the United Nations is testimony to that confidence.

Nearly 13 years ago, the Maldives woke up to the horrors of terrorism when a band of foreign terrorists attacked Male, our capital island, without the slightest warning or provocation, killing many innocent people and destroying property. By their faceless act of violence, they changed the peaceful life we had had in our country for centuries into one full of fear and apprehension.

On 11 September this year, the most powerful country, the United States of America, itself became a target and the victim of a horrendous act of terrorism. The world community was shocked and promptly condemned the barbaric attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the murder of thousands of innocent people. Consistent with its stand against terrorism, the Maldives found itself among the first States to condemn those attacks in the strongest possible terms.

The tragedy of 11 September has reminded us that terrorism is one of the biggest challenges facing the world community today. It has emerged as an enemy of nations, be they large or small, and as a vicious threat to humanity. In combating such a cruel enemy, it is important that international action against terrorism be supported and that it be complemented by measures at the regional and national levels.

At the international level, the legal doctrine against all aspects of terrorism must be strengthened and universalized. Concomitantly, action at the regional and national levels must be brought into line with international obligations in fighting this global menace. The United Nations, as the global organization responsible for international peace and security, must play the pivotal role in this fight against terrorism. My country fully supports the early convening of a high-level conference, under the auspices of the United Nations, to formulate a clear definition of terrorism and to draw up a joint, far-sighted reaction to the ever-growing phenomena of terrorism in its various forms and manifestations. We are also looking forward to the early conclusion of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism and of an international convention for the prevention of acts of terrorism using nuclear, biological or chemical material or agents.

As a people who have devoted themselves to the practice of Islamic faith and values for nearly a millennium, we are deeply offended by the notion that terrorism is linked to Islam or to Muslims. On the contrary, Islam advocates peace, compassion, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The projection and portrayal of Islam as an enemy of civilization or of the free world is an insult to its noble principles. It is a perverted view and a falsification of Islam and its principles. Such perversions are nothing but propaganda hatched by evil people who wish to breed hatred among human beings; their claims are no less harmful than terrorism itself.

At the Millennium Summit last year, our leaders charted a course for a better world, a world in which the whole of humanity can prosper in mutual respect and dignity. Navigating smoothly along that course will be a difficult task. We have to be ready to boldly address the challenges in our way.

Over the past year, we met in several special sessions to address some specific important issues. On each and every such occasion, we demonstrated our firm resolve to uphold the objectives set forth in the Millennium Declaration. The major cross-cutting theme that runs deep in all these issues is the dehumanizing scourge of poverty. Poverty remains the major stumbling block for sustainable social and economic development in the developing world. Eradicating poverty, therefore, is core to the attainment of peace and development. Let us therefore make the elimination of poverty our top priority and pursue

vigorously the target set by our leaders during the Millennium Summit: to halve poverty by 2015.

The commitments we have undertaken at such conferences involve high price tags. Unless new and additional financial resources are made available in a timely and predictable manner, no action plans or programmes can be implemented. It is therefore a collective responsibility of the entire international community, including the private-sector stakeholders and civil society, to muster the necessary political will that is so vital in this regard. We are eagerly looking forward to the International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Mexico early next year. We hope that that event will provide the international community with an opportunity to agree on new, innovative and additional sources and strategies to mobilize funds for development.

Globalization is now a reality. Many in the developed world are enjoying the unprecedented yield of globalization, while its powerful forces are depressing the fragile economies of many developing and least developed countries, including structurally weak countries. The uneven playing field has indeed contributed to widening the gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, the obstacles to the development of the least developed countries have grown in number and magnitude over the years and have marginalized those countries in the world economy. My country, the Maldives, is heartened by the goodwill and solidarity extended by the international community to the least developed countries during the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries held in Brussels early this year. It is now time for delivery on the commitments made at the Brussels Conference. Unless those commitments are fulfilled, the plight of the least developed countries will continue to worsen.

The special circumstances and needs of the small island developing States (SIDS) have been recognized and acknowledged by this Assembly on numerous occasions. The Barbados Programme of Action very clearly spells out these special needs of SIDS. Although many SIDS may appear to be relatively more prosperous on the basis of per capita income level, it is also a documented fact that, due to the special characteristics of small islands, they are generally among the most economically vulnerable and handicapped countries in the world today.

As a country with little more than a quarter of a million inhabitants spread over more than 200 islands, bereft of natural resources and with a fragile economy based on fisheries and tourism, which are sensitive to the harsh realities of ecology and the environment, the Maldives provides a perfect example of this dilemma of the small island developing States.

The stable political environment that the Maldives has enjoyed for the past two decades, combined with the continued flow of assistance from our development partners, have indeed given us the opportunity to improve the quality of life of our people. Our efforts towards development have remained relentless, as the structural constraints we face are both persistent and formidable.

Given these realities, my country is convinced that the present criteria for identifying least developed countries need to be refined to reflect the impediments in full. We appeal to the Committee for Development Policy and the international community to consider these realities on the ground and to look beyond abstract indicators into the inherent vulnerabilities of small island developing States in determining the criteria for graduation.

We do not wish to remain indefinitely in the category of least developed countries. However, should graduation be thrust upon us prematurely, its negative consequences could easily overwhelm us and result in serious erosion of our achievements. We need to strengthen the capacity of our human resources and institutions to cope with existing and emerging challenges to our development efforts. We need to find ways and means to diversify our economic base and strengthen its sustainability.

We welcome the recent resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council to extend our transition period until the next triennial review of the list of least developed countries in 2003. At the same time, we wish to reiterate our belief that ensuring a smooth transition for graduating countries, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/206, is an essential obligation of the entire international community. Indeed, a decision that affects the future destiny of a nation should not be based on hastily compiled information that may contain erroneous assumptions and dubious facts that could mislead the competent authorities, leading them to reach questionable conclusions.

The state of the global environment remains a major concern of the international community. A decade after the adoption of Agenda 21, its effective implementation has proven to be a difficult task. The pleas of small island developing States for new and additional resources to implement the Barbados Programme of Action remain to be heeded. The Kyoto Protocol is yet to come into force. Meanwhile, scientific predictions on the future of the global environment remain alarming. Unless swift and concrete action is forthcoming, global environmental degradation will continue to threaten the survival of humankind and our planet. The consequences of a mere one-metre rise in the mean sea level on small island developing States, such as the Maldives, is now a well-documented fact. We, therefore, urge the international community to accelerate its efforts to agree on a legally binding greenhouse gas emissions reduction regime and to facilitate the Kyoto Protocol's early entry into force. In this connection, we are encouraged by the positive developments achieved in Marrakech last week and hope that these developments will facilitate an early entry into force of the Protocol.

A year from now, we will gather in Johannesburg, South Africa, for the Rio + 10 Summit to take stock of our labour over the past decade to protect and preserve the global environment. My country believes that this would be an excellent opportunity for the international community to reinvigorate its efforts and rededicate its commitments to protect and preserve the global environment.

The Maldives attaches great importance to the efforts of the international community to foster sustainable social development. The five-year review of the Copenhagen commitments and Beijing Platform for Action, carried out last year, and the recently concluded review of the implementation of the outcome of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat Agenda), as well as the World Conference against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance have added renewed impetus to the efforts of the international community to achieve social harmony.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has become a major impediment to social development. The Maldives, too, has not been immune to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Although the number of cases may be relatively low in our country, we are fully aware of the potential threat that looms over us. We pledge our full support to the Programme of Action adopted by the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS early this year, and we call on the international community, including the private sector stakeholders, to commit the financial resources required to implement the Programme of Action.

My country wholeheartedly supports the just struggle of the Palestinian people. My country commends the efforts of the co-sponsors of the Middle East peace process to help put the talks back on track. We strongly believe that the Mitchell report should be implemented urgently to pave the way for restarting the stalled peace process.

Disarmament and arms control measures continue to remain a high priority on the international agenda. While we were encouraged by the positive outcome of the NPT Review Conference last year, we would like to reiterate the need for continuing efforts to strengthen and enforce the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Similarly, we look forward to the day when the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) will come into force.

In conclusion, allow me to reaffirm the firm commitment of the Maldives to the principles and objectives enshrined in the United Nations Charter. We will work with the other members of the international community to uphold and promote these lofty objectives. We remain convinced that the United Nations is the only organization that is capable of creating a more peaceful and prosperous world for humanity.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Josep Piqué, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain.

Mr. Piqué (Spain) *(spoke in Spanish)*: First of all, I would like to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his election as President of this fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Likewise, I would like to congratulate the Organization itself and its Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on having been awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize. Mr. Annan's re-election guarantees the continuous leadership of someone who has enormously contributed to strengthening the prestige of the United Nations and its role in the world.

I also wish to emphasize my full support for the statement made in this Hall by the Minister for Foreign

Affairs of Belgium on behalf of the presidency of the European Union.

The horror of the terrorist attacks of 11 September shocked the world. We were all attacked on that day — all of us who defend freedom, tolerance and respect for the dignity of human beings. Spain knows well the cruelty of terrorism and the grief that it can cause. Therefore, Spain, its Government and its citizens are in complete solidarity with the American people, the families of the victims and this city of New York, which is also our city — the city of the United Nations.

Once again, I wish to express my solidarity and my condolences to the families of the victims of today's tragedy.

After 11 September, we cannot continue acting in the same way. There has been change in the political paradigm — the coordinates that have guided us until now. The paradigm has changed, and now the political culture must also change. Terrorism cannot continue to be regarded as an inevitable evil for our peoples, but rather as a mortal enemy of them all. There can be neither excuses nor pretexts: this is the time to demonstrate the political will of each and every one of us to take effective measures for international cooperation against terrorism — measures which Spain has been promoting for years — to take a qualitative leap forward.

Since 11 September, an important international consensus has emerged on the need to confront terrorism. This shows that terrorism has nothing to do with the differences between North and South or East and West, much less with a supposed conflict between civilizations. Many Islamic countries are among its main victims. It does have to do, however, with the difference between those who commit these kinds of acts or give them their support, and those who consider them to be atrocities and violations of the most elementary principles of human coexistence, which are common to all the great civilizations.

The United Nations has risen to the occasion. Its action has been quick and effective, demonstrating that the Organization is indispensable at the dawning of the new millennium. Resolution 1368 (2001) made it possible for a coalition of wills, of which Spain is a part, to emerge in order to respond to the attacks. Resolution 1373 (2001) expresses the determination of the international community to maintain concerted action for as long as necessary against terrorism: against terrorism without adjectives, against the terrorists themselves, and also against those who lend them any type of support, active or passive.

Progress has also been made in the negotiation of a general convention against international terrorism, overcoming some of the obstacles that had blocked the negotiations for years. Now that we are close to reaching an agreement, we must make an effort to eliminate the problems that are still pending. The goal must be to draw up an operative and effective instrument against terrorism that cannot be paralysed by interminable discussions of a political rather than a legal nature. The subject is of pivotal importance, and the very credibility of the United Nations is at stake. We have a historical opportunity before us; it would be a shame if we were to squander it.

To their cynicism and disdain for elementary human values, terrorists often add a shameless opportunism in order to manipulate particular situations to their advantage. These situations undoubtedly require a solution on account of their intrinsic nature, on their own merits, without any relation to terrorist claims. We must all work together to find that solution.

These situations involve structural problems such as poverty and the marginalization in which many millions of people live all over the world. They also have to do with regional conflicts, such as that in the Middle East, where there is an urgent need to stop the blind cycle of violence and return to the negotiating table. If the political will exists, negotiations are possible. Madrid, Oslo and the advances made at Camp David and Taba prove this. There is no alternative to the peace process and, at the end of the road, the State of Israel and the Palestinian State will coexist peacefully within secure borders.

Terrorist attacks against innocent civilians cause alarm among our peoples, but they are not the only cause for uncertainty at the beginning of the new millennium.

When the political and ideological confrontations that had defined the second half of the twentieth century were largely overcome, other types of conflicts emerged with force. These tend to be not international, but rather internal, conflicts and are therefore difficult to address with the instruments of traditional

diplomacy. Some of them have given rise to serious humanitarian crises that have afflicted our peoples.

At a time when we have decoded the human genome and the advances of biotechnology pose new dilemmas, millions of people continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty, with less than a dollar per day to cover all their needs.

As we witness the interconnection of economies worldwide and can send information instantly to any corner of the Earth, we see how globalization distributes its benefits unequally, making more visible and intolerable the breach between rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, the haves and the have-nots.

These situations give rise to uncertainty, but they also give rise to a demand for solutions. Our peoples turn to us — Governments and international organizations — and they ask us to act, especially the United Nations. Its global vision, its universal composition and its vocation to defend the interests of all humanity give it a unique legitimacy in the eyes of our citizens.

In order not to disappoint these expectations, the United Nations must face the challenge of its modernization, following the path charted by the Millennium Summit.

My country has also undergone a significant process of modernization in recent years, which has enabled it to become fully incorporated into international life. Spain has been able to break away from the inertia of the past and seek new solutions to its new problems. It has done so without renouncing its identity as a bridge between different cultures and regions of the world. That is the perspective from which my country backs the process of reform and modernization. It will continue to do so from the presidency of the European Union, which it will hold during the first half of next year.

The phenomenon of globalization is responsible for much of the current uncertainty facing the processes of change. The United Nations, which thinks globally, is the natural forum for managing globalization.

In addition to the fight against terrorism, effective instruments must be developed to combat drugs and transnational organized crime. This year, progress must be made in the preparation of a convention against corruption.

The International Criminal Court is one of the key instruments of international relations that we will need in the new millennium. Spain has been involved from the start in the fight against the culture of impunity with regard to the most heinous crimes. It now seems more necessary than ever for the Court to start to act. The different legal systems of the world must be duly represented in the court, because globalization does not mean homogenization. No country must be marginalized from this historic process; all must be able to contribute to the Court their own views regarding international criminal justice.

Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation require greater attention from the international community. Progress in the destruction and prohibition of anti-personnel mines as a result of the Ottawa Convention and the results of the Programme of Action of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects are encouraging.

The need to protect the environment is real, and the solutions cannot be postponed. The Kyoto Protocol offers some answers to this problem. Those who do not accept Kyoto will have to propose a better solution. In the meantime, its ratification will be the only practical measure taken in this field. That is why we welcome the agreement reached in Marrakech, which we believe to be a step in the right direction.

New conflicts require new solutions. We must deal with all the stages of a particular conflict through a comprehensive approach that includes efforts to prevent the causes, to keep the peace when crisis erupts, to consolidate that peace and, afterwards, to begin economic and institutional reconstruction. This idea has inspired the efforts being made by my country, in cooperation with the Russian Federation, in the demining project in southern Lebanon. It also motivates efforts, in which Spain is an active participant, to strengthen African capabilities to prevent and settle conflicts. For that reason, Spain was very pleased to welcome the birth of the African Union at the Lusaka Summit, as well as the New African Initiative that was adopted there.

This approach must also be applied to international action in support of the Afghan people, whose situation is particularly dire. We must urgently help them to meet their basic humanitarian needs,

especially given the approach of winter. This international action, to which Spain is contributing, must also include clear support for the economic and institutional reconstruction of the country. The future of Afghanistan is something that only the Afghan people can decide. Nevertheless, the international community must support them so that they can establish a stable Government and maintain normal relations with their neighbours and the rest of the world. In this task, the United Nations must play a fundamental role.

The new diplomatic instruments that are required must accord special attention to humanitarian affairs. The need to protect the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons, access to humanitarian assistance for affected populations and the situation of children in armed conflicts, in addition to the security problem of United Nations and associated personnel — all these issues require effective solutions. If some States fail to meet their responsibilities in this area, it will be necessary to draw attention to their attitude repeatedly, until it changes.

Peacekeeping is an essential instrument in this comprehensive approach to dealing with conflict. The General Assembly must take concrete steps to implement the recommendations of the Brahimi report on peacekeeping operations by increasing the size of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in the Secretariat, improving the participation of the troop-contributing countries in the decision-making process and strengthening civil police operations, in which Spain has played an active role.

None of this will be enough if peacekeeping operations do not receive clear and adequate mandates, backed with the firm political support of the Security Council. If mandates are not clear and adequate, it will not be possible to send United Nations units to places in which they may have to use force. No country is prepared to risk the lives of its soldiers to defend empty words.

This brings us to the need to conclude the process of reforming the Security Council. We need a more representative, democratic, effective and transparent Security Council. Spain, which is a candidate for non-permanent membership of the Security Council in the elections to be held during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, will strive, if elected, to increase the quantity and improve the quality of the consultations with non-member States, especially with those most affected by the issues being debated by the Council.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms — civil and political, as well as economic and social — are the birthright of all humanity and not just of a particular group of States. Their violation today provokes condemnation in a way that it did not in the past. We must continue to strengthen such points of agreement, incorporating the concerns of all.

It is therefore important that the Durban Conference was able to adopt a final document. Spain, like the rest of the European Union, upheld to the end its commitment to the objectives of the Conference. We must take advantage of the agreement reached at Durban to continue to make progress in this field. Along the same lines, my country will organize, in the next few days in Madrid, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, an international consultative conference on student education in relation to freedom of religion or beliefs, tolerance and non-discrimination.

I cannot fail to refer to the question of Gibraltar. As has already been communicated to the Secretary-General, the United Kingdom and Spain agreed, on 26 July in London, to relaunch their talks within the framework of the Brussels Declaration, issuing to this end a communiqué in which they underlined their political will to overcome all of their differences over Gibraltar and to conclude these talks promptly and successfully for the benefit of all the parties involved. Furthermore, they invited the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to participate in ministerial meetings within the framework of this process.

The problem of development is central to the activities of the Organization. The Millennium Declaration constitutes the basic framework for these activities and must be implemented in its entirety. At this session, the General Assembly must set in motion an effective monitoring mechanism for the Declaration.

Spain is also working to define new fields for development cooperation. For example, Spain is a pioneer in the development of microcredits, which constitute a particularly suitable instrument for the development of the less advanced countries. This year, Spain organized in Las Palmas a high-level meeting on tourism and development in less developed countries with a view to placing its extensive experience in this

field at the service of tourism development in such countries, some of which, such as the small island States, have comparative advantages in this field from which they could benefit.

Next April, Spain will also organize the Second World Assembly on Ageing, thus responding to the need to pay special attention to vulnerable populations — those most likely to suffer the highest rates of poverty. The eradication of poverty is the primary objective of both the Millennium Declaration and Spain's policy for cooperation in development.

If there is one group of people who are vulnerable by definition, it is people who are ill. The special session of General Assembly on AIDS and other infectious diseases highlighted the urgency of halting their spread. Spain will make a major contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which has been created for this purpose.

The United Nations will not be able to accomplish all of these tasks if it does not have the necessary resources to do so. The budget for the coming two-year period will be discussed during this Assembly's session. The effort to impose budgetary discipline must continue, but rigid positions that prevent the Organization from facing up to its responsibilities must be avoided.

Evading responsibility is something that the United Nations cannot afford to do, especially today. Unique legitimacy imposes a unique responsibility. The United Nations will be judged in this new millennium by its effectiveness in addressing the new problems confronting it, by its ability to transform uncertainties into solutions, insecurity into confidence and fear into hope.

In conclusion, I would like to make one further comment. In his statement, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco referred to the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla and to other Spanish territories. In the context of the relations of friendship and good-neighbourliness that exist between Spain and Morocco, I wish to stress that the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, and the adjacent islands, are an integral part of the territory of Spain and that their citizens are represented in the Spanish parliament in the same capacity and under the same terms as the rest of their compatriots.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Habib Ben Yahia, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia.

Mr. Ben Yahia (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to begin by extending to Mr. Han Seung-soo and through him to his friendly country, the Republic of Korea, our warmest congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. I wish him every success in his tasks during the session. I would also like to convey our sincere thanks to his predecessor, Mr. Harri Holkeri, for the skill and efficiency with which he conducted the work of this Assembly during the past session.

I am also pleased on behalf of my country to renew our sincere congratulations to Secretary-General Kofi Annan on his unanimous re-election to continue his noble mission. We congratulate him and the United Nations on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

This session is taking place at a time when the world is anxious about the consequences of the atrocious terrorist acts that struck the United States on 11 September. We have strongly condemned these acts and reiterate our condolences to the friendly American people and the families of the victims at this difficult time. States were unanimous in the recently adopted Security Council and General Assembly resolutions in emphasizing the need to combat terrorism with all determination in order to uproot and prevent this scourge.

Since the early 1990s, Tunisia has warned against the dangers of terrorism. It has called for adopting the necessary measures at the national, regional and international levels to fight this phenomenon with all available means. Today, we reiterate our earlier statements. It is important to develop cooperation among States to fight terrorism, by taking all necessary and strong measures to implement Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). This should apply to those who abet directly or indirectly or are involved in perpetrating terrorist acts in their countries of origin or elsewhere. All acts of terrorism must be condemned without double standards, particularly with respect to the granting of political asylum or residency. Tunisia's belief in the necessity of adopting such measures has spared it the presence of extremist elements and terrorism on its territory.

If we are to develop international cooperation in this field, we will need to enhance approved legal

norms. This can be done through a comprehensive international treaty allowing for a comprehensive plan of action. In the same vein, Tunisia supports the convening of an international conference against terrorism. The conference would identify the legal framework and machinery needed to protect the international community from the dangers of this scourge.

In Tunisia's view, the struggle against and eventual elimination of terrorism requires the adoption of a comprehensive approach that makes prevention and the identification of the root causes of this phenomenon the bases of the methodology of international efforts. It is also necessary to consider the international circumstances that influence and promote the increase in terrorism. This will allow us to find the appropriate approach to ending the spread of this phenomenon and its existence. In this context, it is imperative that we address all aspects that lead to feelings of injustice, the absence of justice, deprivation and marginalization. This will prevent suspicious parties from exploiting these feelings to fuel extremism and terrorism. There is no doubt that the United Nations and the General Assembly in particular have an effective role to play in clarifying that vision.

Any comprehensive approach to fighting terrorism must stress the interdependence and interaction between stability, security and peace, on the one hand, and development and progress on the other. The Millennium Summit, which brought together the most important assembly of heads of State and Government in the history of our Organization and provided a unique opportunity to discuss the state of international affairs in all its aspects, stressed that linkage. It highlighted the need to formulate an international strategy and operational plans to achieve the unanimously agreed objectives specified by the leaders for the next millennium.

This session is thus especially important in that it provides an opportunity, a year later, to take stock of the principles and objectives approved at the Millennium Summit. It also permits us to develop concerted action based on these principles and objectives. These include a common, cooperative and consensual approach to the problems of our world, be they issues of international peace and security or of development and the eradication of poverty.

Solidarity, then, is imperative in the light of the many challenges faced by mankind. In this context, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia has stressed before several regional forums, including the Millennium Summit and the Security Council summit, the importance of solidarity in dealing with poverty, which is one source of tension and crises in societies.

We believe that we cannot guarantee stability and security in the world without eliminating all forms of poverty, marginalization and alienation. In this context, President Ben Ali launched his appeal to establish a world fund for solidarity towards the eradication of poverty.

From this rostrum, I extend my sincere thanks to all parties that responded to this proposal and participated in the consultations held by the Secretary-General. In this regard, I cannot fail to commend the efforts of the Secretary-General to prepare a positive report, which we hope will be the basis for establishing the fund at this session. We have repeatedly affirmed that the fund will not duplicate existing United Nations bodies concerned with fighting poverty; it will, instead, complement their efforts and provide a means of financing through voluntary contributions by individuals, institutions or societies, in addition to Governments. These contributions will be deposited in an account to be administered by the United Nations Development Programme.

There is no doubt that the strengthening of the foundations of international peace and security is a task entrusted primarily to the Security Council, which in recent weeks has proved particularly effective in its reaction to current developments. We hope that that important body will maintain the same effectiveness in seeking solutions to all international problems.

From this perspective, developments in the Middle East must take priority among the issues before the Council. This is particularly important in view of the continuing instability in the region caused by Israel's intransigence. We call on the Security Council, and especially its permanent members, to play an effective role so as to spare the Middle East from the spectre of an endless conflict, by urging Israel to take urgent measures to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people. Tunisia reaffirms its initiative, calling for the protection of the Palestinian people through the deployment of international forces in the region.

We believe that the only viable option in the Middle East today is a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that guarantees for the Palestinians the return of their land and their legitimate rights, foremost of which is their right to establish an independent State. In this context, Tunisia welcomes President Bush's affirmation before the General Assembly of the necessity of establishing a Palestinian State. We also reiterate our position on the need for Israeli forces to leave Syrian and Lebanese territory.

The question of sanctions prompts us to examine our consciences in the light of the suffering it causes civilians. We hope that there will be international consensus to remove the sanctions against Iraq and to deal with the humanitarian issue of missing Kuwaitis and persons from third countries. It is also time once and for all to lift the sanctions imposed against our sister country Libya, which has implemented all its obligations concerning the Lockerbie incident.

As a member of the region, Tunisia is working towards more active participation in the Maghreb Union, which aspires to integrate the States of the region by enhancing the structure of the Union and guiding its work, given its function as a strategic option that reflects the will of the people of the region. Tunisia is working to promote consultation and cooperation in the European-Mediterranean space on the basis of equality, mutual respect, protection of the interests of all parties and respect for their particularities. The aim is to bring about the solid development of the peoples of the two shores of the Mediterranean so as to achieve greater security and stability in the region.

Faithful to its commitment to the African continent, Tunisia supports new initiatives for Africa and has joined the newly created African Union and will support it with all our capabilities and experience.

Respect for the purposes and principles of the Charter only strengthens the action of the Organization in responding to the challenges of development and the maintenance of international peace and security. In this context, we have to strengthen the role of the General Assembly, as an expression of the collective will of its Members and as an embodiment of the concept of democracy in international relations.

With regard to the activities of the Security Council, Tunisia, throughout its term of office in the Council, has tried to strengthen the role of this organ by advocating consensus in dealing with the various items on its agenda. This, in our view, will enhance the Council's credibility and will reflect positively on its efficiency.

During its presidency of the Council in February 2001, Tunisia adopted a new comprehensive approach to dealing with various cases of instability and crises in the world.

Tunisia put forward a proposal for holding a debate on the subject "Peace-building: towards a comprehensive approach". The result of this debate was a unanimous affirmation by members of the Council of the close connection between peace and development, of the preventive dimension of this approach and of the importance of solidarity in the international community when it comes to taking measures that are necessary for helping countries that are racked by tension and conflict.

Within this context, I must stress the need for the reform of the Security Council so as to expand its membership of permanent and non-permanent seats on the basis of equitable geographic distribution that will guarantee the interests of all countries, particularly the developing countries. In contributing operationally to the establishment of peace and security in the world, Tunisia has participated in a number of peacekeeping operations such as its current participation in the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) headed by a Tunisian ambassador representing the United Nations.

The elimination of weapons of mass destruction represents one of the major challenges facing humanity. The importance of the establishment of zones free of weapons of mass destruction, particularly in the Middle East, is to be stressed in this context.

Technological and scientific advances have dwarfed distances and enabled mankind to score major achievements in numerous fields, such as spread of ideas and bringing people closer to each other. Development, however, has not benefited all peoples, particularly developing countries. The widening of the quantitative gap between industrialized and developing countries is a matter of concern. Concrete measures must be taken to permit all countries to benefit from the technological and information revolution. From this standpoint, we would express the importance that Tunisia places, since the International

Telecommunication Union (ITU) Conference in Minneapolis, on hosting the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia in 2005. We would like to express our gratitude to all countries that have supported us in this. We would also like to express our thanks to Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, ITU Secretary-General, for his constructive role.

We hope that the General Assembly will adopt at this session a resolution to begin preparations for this conference in its two phases. We also hope that the work of this conference will lead to the establishment of a true and effective world information partnership between developed and developing countries.

Our ability to meet challenges, which we are all facing, including the fight against terrorism, depends on our willingness to channel our efforts towards joint action, based on cooperation, solidarity, tolerance and partnership within the framework of our Organization, which is the ideal place for the realization of our aspirations and for the benefit of all mankind.

Mrs. Mitreva (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): At the outset, allow me to convey our deepest condolences to the American people and Government for today's plane crash and to express our deepest sympathies to the families of the victims for their tragic loss. Our condolences also extend to the people and Government of the Dominican Republic, whose nationals comprised most of those on board.

Pleading for concerted action against terrorism and for urgent accession by States to all relevant international conventions, the Millennium Summit anticipated the need for more effective and comprehensive joint efforts and cooperation. The tragic events of 11 September united the world and reaffirmed the resolve of all of us to fight the battle against terrorism, gathered around our common values and interests. That unprecedented terrorist attack took place during the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The fatal message of terrorism is to destroy the very essence of dialogue as a global response to conflict and violence.

By adopting several resolutions, the United Nations demonstrated powerful solidarity and readiness to combat terrorism. Today that has been reaffirmed by Security Council resolution 1377 (2001), which adopted a declaration on the global effort to combat terrorism.

By expressing its strong condemnation of the attacks and its solidarity with the American people and Government, my country, the Republic of Macedonia, immediately joined the call to establish a global international anti-terrorist coalition. We undertook concrete measures as our contribution to the global efforts and to cooperation to curb terrorist activities.

As a response to terrorism and conscious of the fact that terrorism transcends borders, we also proposed the establishment of a regional anti-terrorist pact, stemming from our terrible experience with terrorism over the last eight months. We called upon the international community to cut off financial support for terrorist activities and, in that context, to strengthen the fight against organized crime, aware of the strong link between those evil phenomena. The resolution of regional conflicts is yet another significant contribution we can make to the fight against terrorism.

With regard to relevant international instruments, we believe that the existing United Nations conventions provide a solid international legal framework for the implementation of many measures intended to eradicate terrorism. While we strongly support the adoption of a comprehensive convention against terrorism and a consensus on a global definition of terrorism, their lack should not prevent us from taking action.

Action is needed now, from all of us — all countries, regions and international organizations. There is no alternative to international cooperation and partnership, as there is no alternative to the common fight against organized crime, which feeds terrorism. But there is one matter we have to keep in mind: different approaches towards acts of terrorism undermine our struggle. There is no big or small terrorism, nor international or domestic, nor one that is tolerated and one that is not. No one should be allowed to practice terror; the consequences are equally devastating. We have to defend more vigorously than ever our shared values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We must not allow ourselves to be manipulated through the use of social, economic, religious and political differences as justification for terrorism.

For the past 10 years the Republic of Macedonia has developed a democratic society, a factor of stability in the Balkans. Our model of inter-ethnic relations was set out as an example and was applauded by the

international community. Then, eight months ago, Macedonia was exposed to violent terrorist attacks that threatened to undermine all our achievements. Under the cloak of struggling for minority and human rights, the so-called National Liberation Army (NLA) — whose structure, command and control and logistics are of Kosovo provenance — wanted to realize one aim: the division of Macedonia and changing the borders in the region.

Our response to those attacks was military, political and diplomatic. The Framework Agreement of 13 August of this year, which was signed by the leaders of the four main political parties, is a result of our strong commitment to finding a political solution to the crisis as the best way to defend our country and undermine the goals of the terrorists. But let me reiterate that we will also defend our country by other means if necessary.

The cost of terrorism for Macedonia was high: lost lives, destroyed homes and thousand of refugees and internally displaced persons. The crisis also caused economic downfall and a large budget deficit. It has had a negative impact on the country's development and has increased unemployment and poverty rates. I therefore urge the international community, financial institutions and, in particular, the European Union to address our needs at the upcoming donors' conference and to consider the possibility of writing off our foreign debts.

At this point, allow me to underline that the international community gives strong political support to the Republic of Macedonia. The European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO are playing an important role in overcoming the crisis, for which we are grateful.

I would also like to commend the prompt reaction by the Security Council. The awareness that the problems in Macedonia were largely inspired in and imported from neighbouring Kosovo resulted in the adoption of resolution 1345 (2001), by which the Council, inter alia, strongly condemned extremist violence, including terrorist activities, and supported the Macedonian Government in its efforts to end the violence in a manner consistent with the rule of law. On 26 September the Council adopted resolution 1371 (2001), which supported the full implementation of the Framework Agreement and rejected the use of violence in pursuit of political goals. Even though the United Nations was not directly involved in the resolution of the crisis in Macedonia, it is present on the ground through its agencies, working in cooperation with the Government to alleviate the consequences. We are grateful for their help, too.

Despite the efforts of the Republic of Macedonia and the international community, attempts are still being made to block the work of the parliament and to obstruct the implementation of the Framework Agreement. The latest events in the Tetovo area, the death of three policemen and the kidnapping of Macedonian civilians are proof that violence continues. We should all condemn these obstacles to peace and stability. Macedonia is determined to pursue the path of peace and will not allow these events to blur our vision and detract us from our main goals of building a strong democracy at home and becoming integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures.

The recent history of crises has shown more than ever the importance of cooperation and solidarity among the countries of our region, and we have acted accordingly. The integration into the European Union and NATO is a common goal of all the countries in the region of South-Eastern Europe. We are all aware that membership is a solution to lasting stability and prosperity.

We are determined to contribute to the strengthening of international peace and security, to enhancing international cooperation in all areas and to strengthening the role of the United Nations. This year, the Republic of Macedonia submitted, and the First Committee adopted without a vote, a draft resolution on the maintenance of international security — good-neighbourliness, stability and development in South-Eastern Europe. That resolution was co-sponsored by 46 Member States.

The struggle against terrorism must not deter us from taking up other important parts of the United Nations agenda. At last year's Millennium Summit we identified the direction of future United Nations activities to which we committed ourselves: the eradication of poverty, the struggle against AIDS, conflict prevention and the protection of the environment. On this occasion, however, let me refer to the matter of the rights and well-being of children, and in that context to reiterate the importance of the upcoming special session on children as a forum to

review the progress achieved and the further steps that need to be taken for the benefit of children all over the world.

Furthermore, globalization remains one of the most important issues on the international agenda. It is obvious that there are some essential problems that need to be addressed immediately. In the new millennium, it is crucial for the international community to address the development agenda in a more appropriate way. We believe that the United Nations has a major role to play in this process. Next year's International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development are the most important events in this respect, and we should all contribute as best we can to their successful outcome. Another important issue is the launching of the new comprehensive trade negotiations under World Trade Organization patronage, with special emphasis on the problems of marginalization, sustainable development and implementation of all multilateral environmental agreements.

After 11 September, the world changed. We have to adjust to the new realities. There are many challenges ahead of us, and the United Nations has to be better prepared to deal with them. That will require even greater commitment on our part. The strength and the success of our Organization depend on the resolve of all its Members to respond to the new realities in a more efficient, relevant and adroit manner. We all have our part to play in this respect. This is the best contribution we can make to building a better world for all of us.

Last, but not least, allow me also to extend my sincere congratulations to the United Nations and to its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on the Nobel Peace Prize award. This is yet another proof of the lasting relevance of the principles and values of our Organization as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and of the outstanding leadership of its Secretary-General.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Reaz Rahman, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh): I wish warmly to congratulate Mr. Han Seung-soo on his unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly. We share the conviction that he will infuse the work of the Assembly with dynamism and a new perspective.

I also join in the warm tributes paid to his predecessor, Mr. Harri Holkeri. We congratulate Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his staff on having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2001. He has brought honour to us all. His re-election to a second term is a just tribute to his dedication, commitment and sheer hard work.

The catastrophe of 11 September has scarred us all deeply. It has brought irrevocable change and inevitable hardship. Yet it has honed and hardened a common resolve, a steely determination to confront and condemn all such irrational and mindless acts of violence. Bangladesh stands committed to fight against terrorism, in all its forms and manifestation, by whoever and wherever it is committed. We believe that terrorism hampers peace and security and creates political chaos and economic instability around the world.

We have therefore pledged total support for the concerted efforts of the international community to confront this scourge as best, as quickly and as comprehensively as we can. We have initiated the process of identifying any possible administrative or financial focus or network of suspected terrorists. We have not given, and will not give, any form of sanctuary, training or support to any kind of terrorist group or cell. We are responding to the call of the Secretary-General and working towards becoming a party to a number of United Nations anti-terrorist instruments. We already subscribe to the 1987 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and believe that it has scope for further strengthening.

As a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), we support, and will actively participate in, efforts to reach an agreement on the early completion and adoption of a comprehensive convention to combat terrorism. We hope that an inclusive approach will be taken that will unite us all in our common struggle against terrorism.

We are aware that terrorism has no consistent profile and that it has many variables reflecting the increasing complexity of human society. But this much is certain: we know what it is not. We must emphasize and underscore emphatically the fact that terrorism has no connection to any one religion or to any particular

region of the world. It is a global phenomenon and should be addressed as such. We therefore welcome President Bush's statement to the General Assembly, at the 44th meeting on 10 November, during which he quoted the sheikh of Al-Azhar University, the world's oldest Islamic institution of higher learning, as having declared "that terrorism is a disease and that Islam prohibits killing innocent civilians".

Previous speakers have underlined the fact that the spotlight on terrorism should not blind us to the pursuit of other pressing objectives. Indeed, terrorism is but one aspect of the many negative forces that shape the substance of what we call globalization, including drugs, organized crime, the illicit transfer of small arms, money-laundering, environmental degradation, and the new diseases that have invaded all societies. Many have intrinsic interlinkages, and none respect borders. They call for collective approaches and concerted global action.

On the positive side, two crucial forces have impelled globalization — mass consciousness of individual rights and the impact of science and technology. The push for individual rights, humanitarian concerns and a burgeoning new humanitarian law are reflected in the worldwide sweep of democracy. Advances in science and technology have closed the information and communications gap. Together, these forces have changed the nature of our world, challenged the context and meaning of sovereignty, and brought about a need for new and dynamic approaches.

The radical changes that came in the wake of the end of the cold war coincided in Bangladesh with the overthrow of military dictatorship in 1990 and the advent of democracy. Since then, Bangladesh has held in succession three general elections that have been acclaimed by all impartial observers, both local and foreign, as being eminently free and fair. We have the unique distinction of being the only parliamentary democracy in which elections are constitutionally carried out by an interim caretaker government within a 90-day period.

The roots of democracy have taken hold and have spread far and wide. Today, despite all of Bangladesh's limitations due to poverty, its people have demonstrated unequivocally that they are a functioning, moderate, modernizing Muslim country. The most recent elections, held on 1 October 2001, had a voter turnout of 75 per cent of an electorate of over 70 million people. What was extraordinary was the unprecedented number of women who freely exercised their right of franchise.

In an overwhelming demonstration of support, the people have returned the four-party alliance led by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to power, with more than two-thirds majority seats in the Bangladesh Parliament. This is an outstanding endorsement of, and triumph for, democracy. It also imposes a huge burden of responsibility on the Government to measure up to this massive mandate.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia, has responded firmly. The new Government is committed to consolidating and developing a sustainable structure of democracy with the participation of the opposition. The primary focus is to restore law and order and to ensure social peace, harmony and justice, so as to improve our capacity to fight poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment. Four factors pace the economic agenda: reducing poverty, raising rural productivity, boosting trade and encouraging investment.

In pursuing these key factors, the Government will refine its already established four-fold strategy of 1991-1996: encouraging macroeconomic reform, stimulating the private sector, enhancing the quality and quantity of development expenditure and concentrating on the quality, not quantity, of investment. There will be a cardinal push for aggressive economic diplomacy in the wake of globalization, which has called for closer interaction between domestic and foreign policy and which has triggered intense competition for greater access to markets, the flow of resources and investments, the transfer of technology and employment opportunities abroad.

In the pursuit of the pre-eminent objective of alleviating poverty, a key concern remains to place people at the centre of all public policies.

In the field of foreign policy, a fundamental charge remains that of reinforcing mutual, beneficial and cooperative relations with all countries and the consolidation of our image abroad as a responsible, stable, moderate, democratic and contributing member of the world community.

Our unwavering policy is to maintain close and friendly relations with our neighbours on the basis of equality, mutual respect, non-interference in internal affairs and the settlement of outstanding bilateral issues through dialogue and negotiation. It is a matter of some gratification that, close on the heels of the formation of the new Government, special envoys of the leaders of both India and Pakistan visited Bangladesh as a goodwill gesture to renew and reinvigorate ties.

In our region, a priority objective will be to revitalize the momentum and credibility of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It is a matter of particular satisfaction that the stalled twelfth SAARC Summit will now be taking place 4-6 January 2002 in Kathmandu, Nepal. It is of vital importance that this first millennium summit of South Asian leaders forge a new vision for the future of the region that will encompass promotion of not only its socio-economic mandate, but also the reduction of tension, the normalization of relations and the creation of a broader-based climate of confidence-building.

Bangladesh believes that the most compelling security challenge facing South Asia is promoting sustainable growth, reform and development. Nuclearization in South Asia has, if anything, enhanced security concerns in the region. Bangladesh adheres to the belief that security goes beyond the weapons a nation possesses and extends to raising living standards and building stable and healthy democracies. The link between development and security is thus crucial in South Asia. This was the underlying rationale of SAARC. The guiding motivation — as enunciated by the late President Ziaur Rahman — was to visibly improve the quality of life of the common people in an environment of peace.

In the global context, a cardinal priority for Bangladesh will be to play an active role through concrete initiatives in all socio-economic forums, to promote the cause of developing countries as a whole and the least developed in particular and, especially, to keep alive special treatment for the poorest of the poor.

A fundamental objective for Bangladesh consistent with our Constitution is to strengthen the role of the United Nations as the central organ for the cooperative management of the world's problems. Bangladesh will continue to actively contribute to the peaceful settlement of disputes, to bolster collective security and peace-building. Our commitment to peacekeeping remains firm and has manifested itself in the participation of Bangladeshi military and civilian contingents in many areas of simultaneous conflicts. We are immensely proud to be currently the largest contributor among blue helmets, serving in ten United Nations missions. In the field of peacekeeping, we believe that the recommendations of the Brahimi Panel provide a good basis, and we feel that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) should be equipped adequately to handle such a requirement. Bangladesh strongly believes that the issue of representation of troop-contributing countries in the military, civilian police and diplomatic components in the DPKO and in other departments, as well as in the mission headquarters, should be seriously considered in the context of the proposed expansion scheme.

Bangladesh's term in the Security Council is now about to come to an end. We have sought to live up to our responsibility with pragmatism and moderation. We have tried to make the work of the Council more transparent, open and proactive and to develop an effective interface between the Council and the general membership to reflect the aspirations of all on issues of common interest.

Today, certain issues both political and economic have assumed centre stage, and our attention is telescoped upon them. Prime among them is the situation in Afghanistan. Bangladesh is a part of the international coalition that seeks to establish a stable, durable, social, political and economic structure in Afghanistan as soon as possible. It is our hope that the Afghan people will have a true opportunity to choose their own system of governance in line with human values and democratic practices in a post-Taliban dispensation. Such a Government should be broad-based, multi-ethnic, demographically and equitably representative, responsive to the needs of the Afghan people and acceptable to the people of Afghanistan, the neighbourhood and the international community. We welcome efforts to focus on positive and finite solutions to the problems of Afghanistan, especially efforts being made with the assistance of the United Nations for forming an interim transitional Government acceptable to the Afghan people. We also welcome two key projects: first, a massive reconstruction and rehabilitation plan and efforts to mobilize funding; second, a hard focus on ways and means to facilitate the return of the refugees. Of immediate importance is the vast humanitarian tragedy in Afghanistan, the need

to contain and minimize the loss of human life and to reach out with immediate relief to refugees and displaced persons.

While new threats to peace, security and economic stability are emerging, the old ones remain. Occupation, inter-State and intra-State conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans, continue to threaten regional and global peace and stability. We are particularly concerned at the steady deterioration of the situation in Palestine, arising out of the encroachment on Palestinian territories and the collective punishment meted out to the Palestinians. Bangladesh will continue to maintain its unflinching support of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to an early establishment of a State of their own with Jerusalem as its capital.

Poverty today remains the "pre-eminent moral and humanitarian challenge of our age" and hence needs to be tackled with due priority. The Secretary-General has reminded us of the commitments made by our leaders during the Millennium Summit last year to eradicate this scourge.

The role of external financial support in the development process has assumed greater importance by virtue of the fact that better education, knowledge, skill and awareness must be effectively integrated into the global economic and market mechanism. In this context, we look forward to the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development in March 2002.

Over the last few decades, access to global markets has been seriously limited for the products of the developing countries in general and the least developed countries (LDCs) in particular. In this context, Bangladesh calls upon development partners to create more access for trade, including offering duty-free, quota-free access to products from the LDCs on a secure, long-term and predictable basis with realistic and flexible rules of origin to match the industrial capacity of the LDCs. We are hopeful that the current Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization in Doha will be able to effectively focus on the obligations to implement the commitments made earlier during the Uruguay Round of negotiations. Debt repayment is also an enormous burden on the developing countries, particularly on the LDCs. We urge the developed countries to expand the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) facility to include more indebted developing countries, with particular focus on the LDCs.

Bangladesh is committed to strengthening and to following up on many ideas to bolster the United Nations capacity to lead, especially that of the General Assembly. Bangladesh strongly supports the idea of forging better coordination between the major organs of the United Nations, namely the General Assembly, Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, for working out a long-term strategy for sustainable peace and development.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it is not the lack of resources that prevents the promotion of a collective and shared perspective on common challenges. What we perhaps need is to muster the determination and courage to build up a collective and inclusive approach for undertaking pragmatic and forward-looking actions. The challenges of the twenty-first century remind us once again that we must seek harmony through diversity, peace through dialogue, and prosperity through mutual cooperation. The United Nations offers the most appropriate and central mechanism to promote our best aspirations and objectives. The journey to peace has always been arduous; nonetheless, it is the longing for peace, progress and justice that has inspired us to work for our better tomorrow.

The Acting President: I am pleased to inform members that we have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting. However, a couple of representatives have requested to speak in exercise of their right of reply.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by the delegations from their seats.

Mr. Mahmoudi (Islamic Republic of Iran): This morning the delegate of the United Arab Emirates raised some unacceptable claims against the territorial integrity of my country. Since we have clearly and repeatedly put our position on this issue on record, I need not go into detail.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully committed to its international obligations, especially those arising from the agreement of 1971. We finally believe that

misunderstandings over the interpretation or application of that agreement, if any, should be addressed with good will and through mutually agreed mechanisms in order to find a friendly solution.

Mr. Eldon (United Kingdom): I would like to respond briefly to the remarks made today by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain about Gibraltar. The longstanding position of the British Government on this matter is well known, and we continue to stand by the commitment to the people of Gibraltar set out in the Preamble to the 1969 Constitution of Gibraltar, which enshrines the principle of consent of the people of Gibraltar to any change in sovereignty.

The British Government shares Spain's view that issues relating to Gibraltar can be resolved only through dialogue such as that which we have recently resumed with Spain under the Brussels Process. We attach importance to continuing this dialogue with Spain as a means to build a better future for the people of Gibraltar, and, like Spain, we would welcome the attendance of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar at future ministerial meetings.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I was not expecting that the appeal, the positive invitation to dialogue, addressed this morning to the Government of Iran would prompt the Iranian delegation to request a right of reply. In response to the right of reply exercised by Iran, I wish to say that my country regrets the repeatedly taken position of rejecting our announced peaceful initiatives to resolve the problem of the three occupied islands through bilateral negotiations or the International Court of Justice. Iran continues its civil and military occupation of these islands. What disappoints us is that Iran is prepared to deal only with marginal questions resulting from the occupation, but not with the substance of the occupation. The historic realities and the documents we have refute Iran's illegal claims to those islands.

It is our firmest hope that the Government of Iran will reconsider its unacceptable policy and agree to our peaceful initiatives, reaffirmed today, in order to arrive at a just and comprehensive solution that restores these islands to their rightful owners, in response to the Iranian proposal for dialogue among civilizations.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.